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GIFTS SHAPES TROOPS

CONSIDERING the heat that morning of May the second, the demonstration theatre of Glovfit's Products Regent Street Showrooms was gratifyingly full. The audience was entirely feminine, and composed of more or less affluent females of all ages from puberty to sixty-five, and of all shapes and sizes : lean and hungry, "boyish," middle-aged, light heavyweights, and serrated layers of protesting adipose tissue ; with waist measurements varying from almost incredible "Twenties" to almost intolerable "Forties." Altogether there were about a hundred and fifty persons in the pleasant little arena, and most of them were fanning themselves with the ornate catalogue of Glovfit's products with which they had been provided. Most of them were chattering with that slightly self-conscious over-emphasis characteristic of assemblies of English Womanhood. Like the majority of purely feminine gatherings, the general effect was vaguely absurd. A gramophone behind the scenes was playing a selection of dance music in a rather croaking manner, due to the fact that the harassed young woman in charge of it had so many other things to attend to she rarely had time to change the needle. It uttered its last croak abruptly just as the clock on Messrs. Liberty's architectural indiscretion almost opposite was striking eleven. The curtains parted, and there was Miss Caligne, head demonstrator. She advanced to the front of the stage. Miss Rosalie Caligne was the ideal commère for conducting a display of belts and brassières, indeed, for any show of intimate feminine raiment. For she was young, but not too young, good to look on, without having a distracting prettiness, with an admirable figure, but one that was robust enough clearly to need artful aid to keep it down to twenty-seven. She knew exactly how to dress for such an occasion, smartly, but with a practical smartness.

And above all she had a formidable personality which showed itself in a dominating eye and an authoritative voice. She could refer to intimate feminine doubts, fears and perplexities in a soothing yet confidence-creating manner, and she had the clerical knack of saying the same thing over and over again and yet somehow varying it, and without revealing the murderous or suicidal boredom which such repetition usually generated within her.

"Good-morning, ladies," she said. "Now before showing you our latest models I wish to make a few general remarks about Glovfit's corsets and brassières before you see them on the living figure. Firstly, they are made of the finest materials by a secret process. They are absolutely hygienic, giving perfect ventilation to the skin, and having an All-Way-Stretch, they yield to and yet support the figure just where that support is needed. We all need support, ladies"—here followed a short memorised dissertation on that curse of Eve, the erect position, containing some delicate observations about the female anatomy and the perils to which its flesh was heir—"balloon tyres," "ptosis," "middle-aged spreads" and "posterior exuberance"—if, she declared, modern frocks were to be worn with a confident and elegant air, such fleshy obtrusiveness must be disciplined and thwarted. Only Glovfit's products could do the job. And now they should have ocular evidence of how well they did it. She stifled a yawn, snapped her fingers, and, mincing on to the stage, became something very young and slim, fair and vacuous. She was succeeded by another and another and another; each one only distinguishable from her predecessors by her bust, waist and hip measurements. Miss Caligne supplied a running commentary. At length she said, "And now, ladies, we come to the last two models we shall show you to-day. They provide the greatest possible contrast, and they will prove to you that Glovfit's are meant for every one, however plump, however slim." She snapped her fingers, whereupon something emerged from one of the wings which drew a gasp of horror from the audience. She

was about fifty, both in age and waist measurement, an incredibly obese, swollen bundle of ubiquitous adiposity. She gazed upon the assembly sardonically and without shame, in fact with a certain pride, for she was the most sought-after, out-out-out-size in her class, and earned a steady four guineas a week. Miss Caligne waxed eloquent as she pointed out what a miracle of disguise was effected on this phenomenon by a "G" model, back-lacing Glovfit. Her words rang loudly in the ears of certain middle-aged matrons in the audience who had learnt to shun the tale told by the full-length mirror in the bathroom. Mentally they allocated three guineas for a "G" model. Then contrast number one waddled off and contrast number two was heralded as follows, "Now, ladies, you're about to see the Perfect Figure."

In the middle of the fourth row was sitting an almost tiny and completely chic little person. She had taken off her hat, revealing a glossy chestnut thatch, "permed" the day before. Her head sloped charmingly up to the end of her parting and it was perched on a long firm neck. This little lady's eyes were a flecked brown, humorous, devil-may-care, and a touch too far apart. Her nose was long, sensitive and tilted pugnaciously. Her mouth was a shade too flamboyant, and her chin a shade too heavily moulded. The general effect was decidedly uncompromising, suggesting temperamental recklessness, sharpened by perfect health—an ensemble which men of sexual prudence instinctively mistrusted. To live with her would be to live dangerously, and they had enough of that in the office. Her name was Mrs. Chalneys and she was a widow. She had been observing the demonstration with small and wandering attention, but when Miss Caligne said, "Now, ladies, you are about to see the Perfect Figure," she sat up and took notice, and kept her eyes intently on the demonstrator. "Miss Bault," continued the latter, "has proportions so exquisite that she has been called an anatomical marvel. You will first of all see her in a model 'F' Flick-on." And then Miss Lucy Bault appeared, stepping delicately.

Published descriptions of persons are inevitably unsatisfactory. The police broadcast bare official generalities which might apply to hundreds of thousands—an unremunerative routine futility. "About five feet ten, sandy hair, grey eyes, straight nose, round face, military carriage, wearing a blue reefer suit and Trilby hat," etc., etc. One might pass a hundred persons whom that description fits in a short walk. And yet there are no two people in the world exactly alike, and even a poor photograph can prove it. Novelists make far more ornate and detailed attempts to convey the pictures of their characters visualised so clearly by them to their readers. But they almost always fail, for that subtle atmosphere and expression which distinguishes one man or woman from another defy analysis. Suffice it to say then that Lucy, apart from her figure, was just an attractive young woman of twenty-four with full black hair, regular features, and an expression of candour and serenity. "Miss Bault," continued Miss Caligne, "has a twenty-one inch waist, yet she will tell you that she finds a Glovfit a necessity to her comfort." Miss Bault nodded her head and continued to move delicately to and fro. She stirred her audience to murmurs of envy and appreciation, and was instrumental in selling more belts than any of her predecessors. And it was ever thus. For it is the dream of unrealisable perfection rather than a sober resignation to mediocrity which causes husbands to groan and couturières and corsetières to leap like young lambs. She disappeared and reappeared several times, and with her final departure the demonstration closed; such of the audience as had been sufficiently hypnotised moved off to the fitting-rooms.

Mrs. Chalneys went to a door on which she tapped. It was opened by Miss Bault—"Lucy" for the future. "Hallo, dear," said the latter, "I've got to see the boss for a few minutes after I'm dressed. Sit down; I shan't be long." There were four doors in Lucy's office; one opened into the sanctum of her uncle and employer, Mr. Stephen Gallin, the sole proprietor of the business, another led to the

outer corridor, another to the stage of the theatre, and the last to her little dressing-room. Through this she disappeared. Mrs. Chalneys settled herself in the arm-chair and got busy with a puff and a lipstick. Lucy reappeared after a few minutes, looking refreshed and cool in a charming little frock which delicately but deliberately revealed the perfection of that figure, at once small-waisted and robust, almost Minoan. She hurried through to her employer's room. He was writing busily at his desk.

"Sit down, my dear," he said. "Well, how did it go?"

"Almost a full house," replied Lucy.

"Excellent; I'd have looked in, but I've been so busy."

Stephen Gallin was about fifty-five and redolent of "Push and Go." His features were what is known as "rugged"—that is to say, somewhat at war with each other, and placed in a rather haphazard way on his big face. His eyes were very small and bright, and his heavy frontal lobes loomed over some formidable eyebrows.

"I'm not going to keep you, my dear," he said, "but with this heat they'll all be bathing soon. Just take a note—here's a pad. Tell the factory to concentrate on the bathing-suits and slow down on the heavy gauges, and we must have plenty of stock of the suspender belts. See what the stock is. I believe it's too low. Lots of women'll chuck their ordinary belts in this weather, but they've got to keep their stockings up, and we mustn't be short of the Faery brassières. You can bathe in them, dry them in the sun, wear them the rest of the day, go to bed in them, if you want to!"

"I thought the last lot had rather too shallow cups," said Lucy. But here they may be left to the technical discussion of such intricacies. Ten minutes later Lucy was back in her office just as there came a stout knock on the door, and Mr. Robert Carshall strode into the room.

"Shan't be a minute, Bob," said Lucy, dialling a number.

"Hallo, Robert," said Mrs. Chalneys. "Are you two lunching together?"

"Yes. Like to come along?"

"Can't to-day. Where are you going?"

"Lombardy Grill."

"Well, I can drop you."

"Ready," said Lucy. And a few moments later they were driving off in Mrs. Chalney's rather sweet little car, at the wheel of which her muscle-rippling chauffeur, Frederick, resembled Oscar Asche on the stage of a puppet theatre.

"Whew!" said Mr. Robert Carshall, hereafter "Bob," blinking in the glare. "How I hate this weather!"

"Then why talk about it?" observed Mrs. Chalneys. "For the British the weather is always too hot or too cold, too damp or a horrid east wind! It's got to happen at regular intervals—sweat or shiver. I'm sure other races aren't so much at the mercy of the temperature and don't regard mopping their brows or putting on an extra blanket as topics for passionate debate. Think of poor Lucy clammily demonstrating her perfect figure."

"It's not so bad," said that lady. "I will say they manage to keep the office fairly cool. I only had three changes, but I will say, also, inserting myself in that new 'Flick-on' was a bit of an effort. It was a 'twenty,' as a matter of fact. Did you like it, Agatha?"

"Yes; I shall certainly order a couple—trade price, of course. But 'Flick' will be a flattering word to describe my writhings."

Bob was registering sprouting boredom. "Oh, do let's have a fraction of a second's peace from those infernal garments," he protested.

"You'll be requiring a man's belt soon," said Lucy. "I suppose you want to talk about your infernal book. Well, you can enjoy a few moments' monologue over lunch."

"How is it going?" asked Mrs. Chalneys.

"So-so, but my brain's like butter in this heat. In fact, my heroine, or whatever she likes to call herself, was becoming all heather-mixture, grouse blood and Bloomsbury—a profound confusion of attributes; but I managed to pull her up with a round turn."

"Well, here we are," said Mrs. Chalneys. "Come in for a cocktail when you leave the office, Lucy."

"I'd love to. Farewell for the present."

Bob had his usual table in the corner. He picked up the mighty menu and started making some suggestions. He was six-foot two, broad in proportion—if there is such a measurement—and tipped the beam at fourteen stone. He was known to his friends—and they were many—as the Baby Elephant, not a very brilliantly original coining, but reasonably appropriate. His face was a pleasant British nondescript; but his brow was high and his head was long, and the impression he left on a discerning beholder was one of kindliness and shrewdness, sharply tempered by some less definable, more imaginative quality. An herma-phroditical amalgam of intro- and extro-version.

He had joined his father's firm of chartered accountants as a matter of course rather than inclination. After a few years, however, he had left it and taken to the writing of novels. He had had three published which had at least paid for themselves, though they had made no particular sensation. Within a limited range he had a sharp feeling for character and he could construct a plot. His weakness lay in a rather limited and conventional vocabulary. He made certain words do far too much work, and he lacked that divine faculty of finding just the word he wanted ninety times out of a hundred. But he was always readable and his last book had been described as a "masterpiece" in a provincial paper. When he read this critique he suggested to his publisher that his sales should be larger, but the latter said, "No," because practically all novels were masterpieces nowadays.

After ordering lunch he said to Lucy, "Well, how's business?"

"Very good."

"And that Caligne woman?"

"Oh, just about the same. I think she loathes me a bit more each day. She's icily polite, but shows in a hundred subtle ways that she'd love to sign my death warrant."

Women have dozens of those little ways of showing how they loathe you, which men never employ."

"She's a bitch," said Bob angrily. "I'll get Gallin to sack her."

"Oh, no," said Lucy. "Don't be absurd; you'll do nothing of the kind. For one thing she's the best demonstrator in London, and after all I *did* pinch her job. She'd set her heart on being the chief's secretary, and you can't expect her to simply adore me."

"She's got a good job as it is," said Bob.

"I know, but she loves power. She's a natural *bosseuse*. The chief's secretary spends half of her time ticking people off and giving orders—the chief's orders really, of course—but you have the feeling of power, even if it is illusory. And if you're that sort of person you can put in a bit of wangling. Rosalie would be in her element."

"Well, I've only seen her once," said Bob. "But I thought there was something dangerous about her. Not a really nice enemy to have, it seemed to me."

"Oh, things'll settle down," said Lucy. "Let's forget her. I love lobster done this way. We always seem to order the most expensive things, don't we?"

"Do you really want to go on working there after we're married?" asked Bob.

"Yes, I must for a time, anyway. I love having something to do. Look what I'd become if I didn't. One of those poor wretched females who get up about eleven, prowl about vaguely for an hour before lunch, changing books at the "Times," and buying things they don't want. And after lunch endless rubbers of bridge, or something ghastly like Ranelagh. Some of them just can't stand it, and either take up golf or a lover or two. Of course if I have babies it'll be different. We have a most discreet and adaptable maternity corselette, but I promised not to demonstrate it."

"Of course, in a way I understand that woman's point of view," said Bob, who had a habit of encircling a topic of debate, with the result that when the circuit was complete

the points of contact often fizzed and sparked from opposed polarity. He was often accused of intellectual and ethical instability on this account. The person with the capacity to see both sides of a question with complete clarity is always suspect, usually a failure in life, but fortunately very rare.

"There *you* are," he continued, "with a great fat private income, there *she* is without a bob, yet you sneak her job and work for nothing."

"I know," said Lucy, "but what's the answer? Are people—well, women anyway—forced to be useless because they've got money of their own? Supposing I'm better at the job than she is? Do you think I ought to chuck it?"

"No, I don't. As for what's the answer, this is one of the myriad questions to which there isn't one. Those who've tried to find one have always advocated something violent and inept, such as selling all you've got and giving it to the poor—which would merely result in creating one more pauper. Any news of Arthur?"

"Not much. Stephen says it's too soon for the treatment to have done much good."

"Who is this girl he's going about with?"

"I don't know much about her—a dance hostess, or something like that. But Stephen says she's a very good sort and helping all she can."

"Well, I hope she is," said Bob emphatically. "For he's simply jam for the crooks—four thousand a year and a chronic thirst. And she puts dope in his drink—sounds a bit odd to me."

"It's the doctor's prescription, as you know," said Lucy. "It's for his nerves and also supposed to put him off drinking. I know it sounds funny, but what else can we do? Of course, Doctor Reynolds says he ought to go to a nursing home, but we'd never get him into one. He seems infatuated with this girl and she may do the trick. He isn't really a weakling, you know, but ever since he was ploughed for the Air Force he's been at a miserable loose end. It was his one great ambition."

"He was ploughed for a weak heart," said Bob. "A bottle of whisky a day isn't the best medicine for that. I know it's a damn shame. I really like him, and he's got brains. Last time I met him he looked a sort of grey-green and his hands were on the twitch—made me feel physically sick."

"Well, he's only twenty-three," said Lucy, "and he's got lots of time to pull himself round. Now this girl has promised to do all she can to help him, and then there's this medicine. Let's hope for the best."

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "I wish I could do something."

"I know, but you can't, and nor can I. Tell me about the book."

Anything but loath, Bob complied, and was still complying when Lucy looked at her watch and exclaimed, "I must fly. We're lunching to-morrow?"

"Sure. I'll call for you."

Lucy's parents had come of rather commonplace, middle-class stock. Her grandfather, Ewart Bault, had founded a solicitor's business which had developed into a prosperous practice in the Midlands. His son, who had no liking for the Law, had sold his interest in the firm on his father's death, and invested the proceeds in a number of speculative industrial concerns. Either his luck or his judgment must have been excellent for, after all duties had been paid, his son and daughter had each inherited a sum of, roughly, fifty thousand pounds. He had settled on a small estate down in Sussex, where he had been heartily disliked; for he had taken to the whisky bottle and developed the silly, sensitive, uncertain temper usually characteristic of those who leave but little of the second bottle for their butlers to enjoy in the pantry every night.

He died suddenly at sixty to the mingled relief and sorrow of his wife; for she still loved him for what he once had been. She was a saint in her way, and a brave and determined one. She had not a penny of her own, and coaxing the money necessary for the upkeep of the establishment,

the education of the children and her own small needs, out of a sick and sullen bully, had become her chief and horrible preoccupation. But she had her garden, her pets and her friends, and, on the whole, showed a sweet and smiling face to the world. She did not long survive her husband, and was thereby saved from what would have been her crowning sorrow—the sight of her son taking after his father.

Arthur, when he stood by his father's grave, had tasted nothing stronger than ginger-beer ; but soon after he went up to Cambridge. Our great universities are, no doubt, rightly considered stark testers of character, and to be revered on that account. This certainly applies to the capacity of that character to resist the lure of alcohol.

But that test is possibly somewhat too crudely indiscriminating in the case of such persons as Arthur, who have inherited taste for its consumption and unlimited funds for its obtaining. He took to it rather omitously readily, and his capacity for absorbing it was a subject for amused admiration amongst his contemporaries. He was very popular for other reasons, his natural kindliness, generosity, modesty and sharpness of wit. He had only intended to stay up for two years—his final goal being the Air Force. But the authorities decided that one year was ample, and his doctor was forced to break the news to him that the state of his heart and the career of a pilot were incompatible. That gave the inherited demon the chance it might never have finally had—a chance it took imperiously. The Sussex estate having been sold, Arthur came up to London and found himself at a chronic loose end with five thousand a year to loose it still further.

There are plenty of astute and ingratiating persons in the West End ready to exploit such a situation, and with a comprehensive technique for so doing. Arthur hated and despised both himself and them, but something essential had snapped within him and he started well on his way down that road beset with a versatile company of demons which ends at a drunkard's death.

Lucy, for reasons which Mendelism may explain, entirely escaped the paternal thirst. She liked cocktails and wine, but abhorred even the faintest tendency towards that garrulous irresponsibility which a spot too many produced in her, and some protective instinct told her straightly when that tendency was imminent.

She had gone from Roedean to Paris, and from Paris to Basil Street and an interview with her maternal uncle, Stephen Gallin, whom she had seldom seen and hardly knew. An appointment as his secretary had immediately followed. She had known Bob, who had been a great friend of her mother's, ever since she was a small flapper, and one day most unexpectedly found she was in love with him and—not quite so unexpectedly—that he was in love with her. She had tried hard to help Arthur, but he consistently avoided her, and went his own grim way.

Stephen Gallin was the creator of Glovfit's Products, and its success was a great tribute to his inventive talent, die-hard courage, pertinacity and all-round commercial acumen. No one who has not been granted some inside knowledge into such matters can realise the vast amount of intelligence, grinding toil and, at times, almost desperate guts it takes to nourish and force on the market successfully a new type of article of commerce, unless it is backed by great resources. The attempt is always a gamble, and it takes a gambler with peculiar and rather rare qualities to face the hazards with any hope of winning through. And no market is more congested, in none is the competition more virulent and violent than that which supplies ladies of means with the multitudinous necessities, quasi-necessities and sheer extravagances which they require, or can be coaxed into requiring, for the salvage and adornment of their bodies.

Great fortunes are made in such commerce, for selling prices are often fantastically out of proportion to costs of production, and many of such goods are swiftly perishable.

Furthermore, it has many times been revealed that such articles are the last to be affected adversely by a slump ;

the demand for golf balls and cigars slackens far sooner and more drastically than that for the most costly silk stockings, up the ladders of which many have climbed to fortune. At the same time the demand for any particular proprietary article is unanchored and fickle; and a slant of fashion may point to Carey Street.

Gallin had had no great resources when, by what might almost be described as an inspired whim, he had given up his life first to the invention and then to the marketing of Glovfit's Products. He had inherited a few thousand pounds, and his brains and enterprise had done the rest. The stuff he sold was as decorative as it was scientifically designed, and he had a natural perception for advertisement; that is to say, he neither over-spent nor starved his business, knew when to slacken and when to go all out, and he made every penny work its passage. His commercial nerve was invariably steady—and it had need to be, for nothing is more eccentric and erratic than the female torso.

The waist-line veers around from just below the bosom to just above the hips whenever the judgment of Paris decides that it will be commercially profitable to start it on its travels again.

Sometimes a Cochran or a Ziegler ordains that what are politely referred to as "curves" shall be emphasised, at others disciplined as nearly as possible into oblivion. Sometimes the edict goes forth that breasts are to be worn, at others eliminated; and the same applies to tummies and rumps, though, of course, Nature has still some say—perhaps always the last word, in such experiments with her intractable handiwork. The corset and brassiere business is acutely affected by such a cult of blubber and bone, and therefore Gallin, as a designer of Foundation garments, had to be a subtle and to some extent prophetic artist. Furthermore, he had many bitter and envious rivals.

Meanwhile Miss Caligne had been lunching alone on two sandwiches, a piece of cake and a cup of coffee at a Corner House.

To eat when under the influence of violent emotion is said

to interfere with the processes of digestion. If so, she should have suffered from the pangs of acute dyspepsia, for she was experiencing that violent emotion, hate—its object, Miss Lucy Bault. It was not for the first time, and it was not a wild, unreasoning hate, but a controlled and calculating one. The expression in her steely, heavy-lidded eyes revealed her perfect self-command and formidable will. It is said to be beyond dispute that there is no such person as a completely feminine woman or a completely masculine man; the sex strain is never quite pure. The alien percentage may be anything from an imperceptible five, to that barely mentionable fifty per cent which has through the ages exercised an odd fascination over a certain type of imaginative mind. Miss Caligne was, of course, predominantly feminine, but she had a potent masculine streak which, however, contained within it no male chivalry or sentimentality. But just that hard, resolute, ruthless clear-sightedness which is the distinguishing characteristic of all great entrepreneurs.

Rosalie had reasons, and very valid ones, for that hate. She was at twenty-eight still all right for her work, but she wouldn't be very much longer, and then what! An increasing terror of being jobless—or else marry money. That had always been her goal, a rich husband or a generous supporter. She viciously crushed out a cigarette as she thought what rotten luck she'd had. There had been old Hulldon, the boss of Hulldon's, with fifty thousand a year and bored to death with his wife. He'd picked her out from the other models and made her his secretary, and then had begun the process she had hoped for: the smiles that were rather more than conventional facial contortions, the introduction of extra-commercial topics into the conversation, hand-pattings, and mild, furtive fondlings when he kept her quite unnecessarily late at the office; and then the proffered and accepted lift home in his car. The last stage, slippery week-end meetings, presents and bribes, had just been reached when the old fool got pneumonia and passed out. And then there had been Julius Guldfish who'd also reached

that stage, got scared and fired her, leaving her without a particle of evidence she could use. She had almost brought young Wenderlay up to the scratch, and then he met an American flapper oozing dollars, and she'd had to get another job.

Lastly there was Gallin. *He'd* picked her out and made her his secretary—for just two weeks, when that cursed little devil Lucy Bault had butted in. He probably didn't pay her anything—so saving a salary, and she had thousands a year. The little blackleg and scab! Rosalie had a desperate feeling that she was missing her last chance, and in that case what had she got to look forward to? An indefinite number of years of demonstrating and fitting, of jabbering drivel about Glovfit's to an endless series of loathsome women, some insolent, some half-witted, some who gave her meaning and equivocal glances—they were the worst and usually the richest, with their pictures in the illustrated papers every week. She loathed the very smell of the fitting-room. That reek of hot, scented, fat bodies. Only sheer will-power kept her going, and working as she did like a coal-heaver she'd age early, her face would get shabby and lined. And one day a month's wages and the sack, and then what? Behind a bar, if she was lucky. On the streets if she wasn't. It would be just as bad as that.

Yet if she'd remained Gallin's secretary all might have been well. She could have made herself indispensable to him, which would have meant at the least a permanent well-paid position of some influence and power. And she felt confident it would have meant something more. She knew her Gallins; they might think they were inveterate bachelors, but as they grew older they grew lonely, and a clever woman could exploit that. She'd seen lots of cases of it. "Romance of Commerce," and the old fool with a flower in his buttonhole and his hat at a rakish angle, with his arm through that of an unblushing bride coming out of a registrar's office. Just that little Bault coming between her and that! Her eyes narrowed as she looked out over

Coventry Street. She remained almost motionless for several minutes, then got up abruptly, paid her bill and hurried back to the office.

When Lucy reached Mrs. Chalney's discreetly 'lavish flat on the fourth floor of Devonshire House, she was feeling fagged out. The day had become sombre and breathless, and the froust in the office beyond the power of fans and open windows to alleviate. Gallin had been in an irritable and fussy mood, and suddenly decided to dictate a vast and abusive tirade to the factory manager. He had rattled it off at about two hundred and fifty words a minute, and she had spent a frantic last half-hour trying to decipher her short-hand notes, and the telephone had rung about a million times.

"Oh, dear, give me a strong one," she exclaimed, as she flung herself full-length on a settee.

Mrs. Chalneys gave her a quick glance and then went over to a table on which were many bottles, two glasses, ice and a man's-size shaker.

"Oh, I shouldn't care for your job in this weather, darling," she said over her shoulder. "Why don't you chuck it?"

"Oh, don't begin on that," said Lucy irritably. "I had it all out with Bob again at lunch."

Mrs. Chalneys finished mixing and shaking, and brought Lucy over a glass. The latter took a sip and gave a little shudder. "Gosh! that's a rasper, but how delicious!"

"It's my own invention. I call it the 'First Night.'"

"Any reason?" asked Lucy.

"Because it exceeds your wildest expectations and you long for many more. Not," she added, "that that was exactly my experience."

Lucy appeared to be brooding.

"I know what you're thinking about, darling," said Mrs. Chalneys.

"I'm sure you do, and it's rather thrilling. Anyhow, I

should think four of these would restore the apparently drowned."

"It's the vodka which gives it the kick," said Mrs. Chalneys. "You *do* look tired. Is he overworking you?"

"Oh, no, but we're always frightfully busy at this time—we've got those new models coming out."

"I adore those 'Swim-Ease' suits of yours," said Mrs. Chalneys. "I must get half a dozen."

"They are really out of our line," said Lucy, "but Gallin is always experimenting. They're selling well."

"I can imagine it—the lightest and tightest I've seen. In that white one I shouldn't feel over-dressed in a nudist colony."

"I know," laughed Lucy. "And the comic thing is that from the point of view of dear old Decency, and protecting the morals of the male, they make one look ten times more attractive than if one was in one's birthday suit. For they make taut and crisp what is usually a bit wobbly."

"That's why Baudelaire praised silk tights," said Mrs. Chalneys, draining her glass. "For he said they drew the discordant elements of the female body into a unity. I don't remember many things I've read, but that's stuck in my head. By the way, the more I see of that tough baby Caligne the less I like her. She's rather superb in her way, but I shouldn't care to be at her mercy."

"Nor should I," said Lucy with feeling. "She loathes me."

"So I've noticed. I was watching her rather closely this morning and when she mentioned you her ears went back."

"Well, I pinched her job."

"Is she a nuisance? Shall I poison her for you?"

Lucy looked slightly uncomfortable.

"All right," laughed Mrs. Chalneys. "I know you hate my alluding to my murderous past."

"Oh, don't be a moron," said Lucy. "Why can't you forget about all that nonsense?"

"I'm not allowed to. See these?" She held up three

letters. "They came this morning." She tore them up and flung them into a waste-paper basket.

"Do you mean to say you still get them? What utter swine there are in the world!"

"Oh, yes. They average about ten a week. Come on—have another."

"What, a third! I shall be absolutely tight," said Lucy.

"Oh, no, not on three. Here you are."

"Well, don't let's talk about that wretched female," said Lucy. "I imagine I would feel just as she does."

"All the same, I would keep my eye on her—she's got a nasty look in hers—like a dog that is about to gnaw one's calf. I simply couldn't work with a lot of women. I should go completely insane. They are catty enough about clothes and men and things, but add salaries and jobs—my god-fathers!"

"They're all right if the boss has a square chin and they are afraid of him," said Lucy. "And now I must go, I really am feeling rather odd."

"Oh, don't go, darling, I'm feeling so lonely this evening."

"Then why the devil don't you get married again!" exclaimed Lucy, with the explosive bravado of the slightly tight. "Millions of men would love to. Fancy wasting all your many charms on a mirror."

Mrs. Chalneys tapped her heels on the floor, and a curious expression passed across her face. "I've had rather a rough experience of matrimony," she said.

"Well, try again," said Lucy. "It's ghastly to see anything so lovely wasted. "Oh, dear, what am I talking about? Are you doing anything to-morrow night?"

"No."

"Well, let's get Bob to take us to a road-house. I'll give you a ring at ten. And now assist me to the lift. Three 'First Nights' in half an hour have been too much for me."

As a matter of fact Lucy was feeling none too well as she

drove home to her flat in Basil Street. She flung herself down on her bed and rang for her maid.

Bob had dined with his publisher, but the latter had to catch an early train home, so Bob was back in his chambers in Charles Street by half-past nine. The telephone was ringing as he entered his sitting-room. It was Cora, Lucy's maid.

"I tried to get you twice before, sir."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's Miss Lucy, sir—she's been taken poorly."

"How do you mean?" Bob's voice betrayed his anxiety.

"Well, sir, she's been very sick and she's shivering, and her heart's bothering her."

"Send for her doctor at once. I'll come right along."

"I've sent for him, sir, and he'll be here any minute now."

"Well, tell him to stay till I come."

Bob's hand wasn't quite steady as he put down the receiver. "Sickness, shivers and heart" might mean anything, might be the prelude to many perilous diseases. He suddenly realised how terribly in love he was, and he had a sharp premonition of the racking penalties of being so—that ecstasy of happiness, how precarious, how conditional. He had known all this—or thought he had—described it with what he believed was some insight and subtlety. But with what infinitely greater clarity he realised it now, because it was *his* sweat that was bursting out, *his* heart that was racing. Only a supremely imaginative writer could find such poignancy in his puppets. He dashed out and down the street for a taxi.

When he reached Lucy's flat he found Doctor Goulby waiting for him in the sitting-room. The doctor was elderly, stout, pompously brusque, and quite satisfied with his somewhat prehistoric ideas of healing.

"How is she?" asked Bob anxiously.

"I don't think it is anything to worry about," replied Doctor Goulby in the tone of one who had invented both the disease and its cure. "It looks like a mild case of food

poisoning. She had lobster at luncheon with you, so she tells me."

"Yes."

"It is almost certainly that."

"I had it too."

"That signifies nothing. One portion might have been tainted, the other not. I will call again in the morning, and, my dear sir, please do not worry."

"May I see her?"

"For a moment, yes."

Lucy was lying on her back in her big blue bed. She greeted Bob weakly, and he kissed her damp forehead. Her face looked bloodless and her eyes were darkly rimmed.

"Well, what's all this, darling?" said Bob with forced heartiness.

"I don't know, my sweet. I had a cocktail with Agatha, and when I got home all this started almost at once. I have been horribly sick three times, and then I got shivery and sweaty at the same time, and my heart began to bang and miss beats. It's doing it now; I hate it. Don't fuss, I'll be all right soon."

"Old Goulby thinks it must have been the lobster, but he's quite sure you'll be all right in no time."

"Of course I shall. It all comes from ordering the most expensive things." She smiled wanly. "And now you must go at once, for I'm going to be sick again. Cora!"

The maid came hurrying in.

"I'll ring up first thing in the morning," said Bob fervently, and then walked slowly home. He was deeply stirred and obscurely touched by fear.

CHAPTER TWO

MISS PEGGY CAMDEN was swinging her legs over the arm of a chair in the sitting-room of a flat in Rupert Street. She was smoking a cigarette and crooning fairly melodiously. She seemed very pleased with life in general. The hour was six p.m. She was twenty-three and looked nineteen, but moralists who knew her history would have said she deserved to be taken for forty-five. Physically she was a wholly appetising little creature, nimble-bodied, cheeky-eyed, with lovely skin and teeth, the right sort of blonde hair, and radiating an impression of self-confidence and quick-wittedness and, to the casual observer, almost virginal innocence. As a matter of cold fact, she had no moral sense in the usual connotation of that term, but she had great good nature, a kind heart, and a certain sort of loyalty. She could drink strong men into oblivion, cared nothing for the marriage service, and was known to Scotland Yard as the mistress of a highly-reputed confidence man. In certain moods when she felt like hitting the "high spots," she hit them hard, and realising that it was an iron law of economics that a mug and his dough were soon parted, had no compunction in making herself an instrument for proving that law. The idea that the best vamps are tall, dark and sinister, with long, lithe bodies and flickering serpents' eyes, baritone voices and cruel mouths, is quite erroneous. There is that type, of course, but those who belong to it are almost invariably temperamentally sluggish and incurably domestic. The really great vamps are, in appearance, identical twins of Peggy Camden. She was the daughter of an Anglo-Catholic Devon clergyman, and by the age of fifteen had made good her right to be considered the cuckoo in his congested nest, the poisoned barb in his copious quiver. Her mother, a woman of considerable attraction and temperament, had come to find the rectorial paradox between the Reverend Paul Camden's distaste for, and repudi-

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ation of, sexual matters and her nine children, and consequent unremittent overtime, rather a strain on both her faith and fidelity.

Peggy, having established herself as a staple topic of hushed and ribald conversation in Burlestone and the regions round about, realised the significance of this, realised she might conquer wider worlds, and so, on her eighteenth birthday, having purloined three pounds from her father's note-case, and rifled the money-boxes of her six younger sisters, bought a third-class ticket to Paddington—her few possessions in a brown-paper parcel. She took a very cheap room in a decrepit lodging-house, and then went straightway to the Piccadilly Palace Hotel; for the simple reason that her father had once stayed there on a visit to London and had expatiated on its luxurious appurtenances and aristocratic clientele at great length. Her entry into the lounge created a sensation, for she looked about fourteen and simply adorable, but her clothes raised loud cackles from the callous. She ordered a coffee, looked eagerly and defiantly around her, and immediately caught the eye of a youngish man who presently slipped into the chair beside her. He was a dress designer by profession and a gentleman into the bargain. A few adroit questions put him *en rapport* with Peggy's circumstances, a few quick glances told him she had the makings of a superb "model." He stood her a small glass of port, gave her tactful good advice, and then drove her home. On leaving her—and he did it at once—he gave her five pounds, and told her to call upon him the next morning at his Hanover Square establishment.

For eight months she studied and posed, got outside work with commercial photographers, and prospered in a small way. But her innate independence made her grow bored with such a controlled existence. The time, however, was not wasted, for she had learnt to dress and make the best of herself, and become a shrewd judge of masculine intentions. She got a job as a dance hostess at a fashionable club, but she soon realised the limitations of that career and drifted

into the chorus of a non-stop revue. But this was altogether too much like work, and she had just chucked it when she met and fell in love with Mr. Roger Harter—at least that was the name he was wearing at the moment—and then and there linked her fate with his. It was this person who entered the room just as Peggy threw her cigarette-end into the fireplace.

"Hallo, duckie," he said, kissing the back of her neck.

"Jeez, I want a drink; my mouth's like a vulture's eyrie!"

"Give me one," said Peggy—"not too stiff. What sort of a day have you had?"

"Alcoholic, but promising," replied Mr. Harter, mixing a couple of Scotches. "Until he passed out cold, my nice new Yankee buddy was keenly interested in my financial proposals."

"Who is the guy?"

"A romantic figure, rejoicing in the moniker 'Henry D. Cobleater.' He started his career as a soda squirt and is now something large size in real estate. Of course there were stages in between. Anyhow, he has acquired two million dollars, a house in Park Avenue, four automobiles, two yachts, and one Follies blonde on the instalment system."

"Why didn't he leave his town residence by the top window during the slump?" asked Peggy. "Are you sure he's O.K.?"

"Absolutely. He's got a roll like a balloon. It's so titanic he has to split it up, and he's got twenties and tenners hanging out of every pocket."

"But are you sure he's a sucker and not playing you up?"

"Sure. I've got a sixth sense for that sort of daddy. For some reason they go crackers when they get to Europe."

"When do you think you'll break it?"

"Within a week, if I keep out of the morgue. He makes me drink one for one with him, and, oh boy! it's ample. There are eighteen empty bottles of Scotch in his suite at the Savoy, and there was a half-full one beside his bath-tub,

and you ought to see him with a siphon. He may have thrown a neat squirt in his day, but he's dead out of practice. He gave me a full load in my right lamp when he thought he was filling his glass, and that was at eleven a.m."

"What are you playing him for?"

"Five grand."

"And then you'll skip?" Peggy's tone was anxious.

"No, baby, I won't have to leave you; he'll never squeal. He'll just get himself into a quiet corner and then kick himself to bits. He thinks he's a financial ace. He won't want his hated rivals to laugh him down as an ace pill. He'll gulp it down with a case of Scotch."

"I met Spiller in Piccadilly this morning," said Peggy.

"That swelled headache! Did he speak to you?"

"Yes, he told me three things I knew already. That it was a fine day, that I was looking prettier than ever, and that three months in Holloway was bad for the complexion. I told him that I wished all busies were like him—I should feel far less nervous."

"I don't know," said Harter. "He loves himself too much, but he's not my idea of a nice dick. He's got small feet and they're not flat, and his boots don't squeak. Also he's got something solid above the ears. Did he say anything about me?"

"Nope, but I told him you'd joined the Salvation Army, so he'd have to get his next quarter's rent from the Rabini gang."

"Well, I'm going to change," said Harter. "My duds stink like a bar towel."

"One more drink," said Peggy.

They knocked them back and he disappeared through a door into the bedroom.

Mr. Roger Harter had been christened "John Walter Leveret." His parents had died when he was a preciously enterprising small boy. This was perhaps as well, for his father, like the sire of the most lugubrious and sepulchral of all the Shropshire Lads, had no presentiment on the night

he got him that he had contributed to the procreation of the cleverest "con. man" in Europe; and his mother was equally blissfully unaware that she had borne such a prodigy. And yet—what do parents desire for their sons? That they should be handsome, charming, healthy, clever? That they should be happy and prosperous in their life's work and show the highest courage pursuing it? That they should cohabit with the right mate? If so, John Walter Leveret represented the sum of their dreams.

He had been left in charge of a guardian who had put him in charge of the Provost of Eton. After numerous and versatile escapades the provost had repaid the compliment by returning him to the charge of Mr. Algernon Remnant. The latter had then transferred him to the care of a muscular martinet who specialised in the taming of wild youths. There had been twelve others being broken in when John arrived at Hastings. After he had been there for two months the twelve were wild indeed; and the martinet, realising he had met his master, drove him from his door. This was in July, 1914, just in time for John Walter to enlist in a cavalry regiment at the age of sixteen. He made an admirable soldier, received two wounds and the D.C.M. War is a cynical judge of merit, for of the dozen, six were killed in circumstances which gained them posthumous decorations. Happy warriors many times spend their latter days in Dartmoor, for the God of Battles beckons some odd saints around his throne.

On getting his discharge, John Walter made the awkward discovery that his guardian had died after embezzling his small patrimony. So, in the argot of those days, some means of livelihood was indicated. He made several worthy attempts to do so, but failing hopelessly, set up on his own. He chose the career of one who inspires confidence in persons of property with a view to removing the latter from the former. He found this profession one for which his talents and personality eminently qualified him. He had practised his craft on both sides of the North Atlantic with considerable success and had beaten the rap

on the one occasion he had faced a judge. He had a philosophy of his own, an orthodox one. He considered that the ingenious separation of persons from their money was the second oldest profession in the world, and he failed to see why his branch of it was singled out for reprobation. Some went to the House of Lords, some to quod, and some to both. And, unlike some ennobled bandits, he had never swindled a poor man and never swung a friend. He was dark, wiry, robust, temperate in all things, generous in his way, and within his ethical enclave, a gentleman.

He had fallen in love with Peggy at precisely the same second she had fallen for him. He was as perfectly faithful to her as she to him. In fact, had they been united in Holy Bondage they would have been an odds-on bet for the Dunmow Fitch.

Presently he returned to the sitting-room, looking spruce, well-favoured and care-free.

"And how's God's gift to Haig and Haig?" he asked.

"I believe he's laying off a little."

"You haven't been chucked out lately?"

"You only get heaved out of the 'Pink Nightie' if you drink too little," replied Peggy.

"You think he's getting better?"

"I'm not the doctor, but he's certainly tamer, and he gets sleepy pretty soon."

"I believe you rather like the guy," said Harter.

"I do in a tiny way. He's no half-wit, he's ruddy miserable, and I'm sorry for him."

"All the same, I don't much care for you going about with a soak like that. How much longer will you have the job?"

"I told Gallin I'd stick it for three months, three days a week—that's two months more—and then I'd quit."

"How do you slip him this love potion?"

"I dump it in his glass when he goes to powder his nose."

"You don't want to be seen doing that," said Harter irritably.

"It's O.K.—doctor's prescription."

"All the same it looks phoney."

"I know; I'll watch my step."

"Well, you watch it," said Harter emphatically. "When they start pulling shut-eyes it means they're getting interested in natural history; rosy-checked gorillas and yellow-billed wall-snakes, and sometimes they pass right out. That would mean your picture in the papers, and we don't want that."

"He's crazy about me," said Peggy, stroking her upper lip with a rouge stick. "I think I can hold him in; and forty a month is handy, with a bonus of fifty if the dope works quick."

"If a bozo's as pickled as that," said Harter, "nothing acts quick. I guess his liver looks like a case of studs, and the booze smoke's pouring out of his hair."

"I've been feeding him angostura and soda," said Peggy.

"That would cure me," said Harter, yawning. "Well, I must go back to the office. I sure work for my living. Two clubs, three bottle parties and home to a quart of Scotch. But I'll see he doesn't team up with a boiler." (By which expression he meant a young woman of easy access.) "I want that roll myself. He's got a nasty habit of taking out his false teeth and rubbing them on his sleeve. It gets a laugh from every one but me. We're nursing a brace of beauties! Well, so long; see you in the morning."

He kissed her fervently and went his way.

Half an hour later a taxi set Peggy down in a court not so far from Piccadilly Circus. Over the door was the legend "The Pink Nightie Club." She went up to the first floor, rang the bell and was shown in by the club's man-of-all-jobs, known to the members (and very temporary members) as "Snoot." Like all night-club employees over the age of puberty, he had known a varied career. His finest qualification for his office was a very straight left, for which the more sportive members had acquired a great respect. He had been a deck-hand on a tramp, a bookie's tout, and a take-on-all-comers pug at fairs. He was then very comfort-

ably, if in all probability temporarily, settled. Like most persons of his type, he had a face that was quite indescribable, for it had taken unto itself so many rights and lefts that its original contours had become practically obliterated. His nose and one ear had a menacingly significant appearance, but the expression in his better eye was genial.

Peggy passed through a door into the bar. Along the counter a number of persons of all four sexes were seated on high stools in varying degrees of alcoholic remorse, exhaustion and exuberance. The barmaid, who looked quite lovely in one or two lights, was ministering to their wants, and revealing herself as a past mistress of rather reminiscent repartee. From the wall opposite came clanging and cursing from the bob-and-penny fruit machines or "diddlers." These are perhaps the finest symbols of human credulity, for no one has ever been known to leave their lure a winner; save one mythical person who is alleged to have snatched the jackpot with his first bob and rushed from a club, never to return.

There are said to be four hundred and fifty night-clubs and bottle parties—the latter an offspring of the former and rapidly devouring their parents, within a small radius of Piccadilly Circus. The number run "legally" certainly doesn't reach double figures. The "Pink Nightie" was comparatively legal. That is to say, it possessed a licence to sell drinks, and a supper licence to keep them on the table till twelve-thirty. Also, it did not allow non-members to enter its premises unintroduced. Against that must be said that only two per cent of the members ever paid a subscription, and there was no system of election whatsoever. The only laws broken on the premises were the following: Selling drinks after hours, bribing policemen, harbouring prostitutes, allowing non-members to pay for drinks, and a few other less serious delinquencies. Also it attempted—with the able assistance of Snoot—to keep out or heave out the more notorious crooks and gangsters. The other five clubs and parties in the court were not so scrupulous.

Night-clubs, bottle parties, and those great twin brethren of rascality, horse and dog-racing, are superficially the most obnoxious influences in British social life. Yet, perhaps, they are all safety-valves and therefore to be encouraged. But those who have been their victims will sign no petitions for their reprieve.

Peggy fetched herself a drink and sat down at a table. Whereupon a spotty, debauched but not, in a way, brainless-appearing person said softly, "Hallo, Peggy."

The latter gave him a resounding "raspberry" or "Bronx cheer," and replied, "Hallo, you lousy swine! Why do they let you in?"

The spotty one gave her a nasty stare.

"Don't you look at me like that!" shouted Peggy. "Been passing any duff kites lately? Been carving any steamers? Been using your keep for any frame-ups lately? Don't give me any of your filthy mouth, or I'll turn you over to the dicks!"

(These queries implied that Mr. Wilkins was in the habit of passing bad cheques, swindling mugs, and indulging in a spot of blackmail at the expense of the amorous, indiscreet and timorous.)

Mr. Wilkins's face went very hard. "I'll fix you yet, you little boiler," he said.

Peggy swept up to him and slashed both his cheeks viciously with her clenched fists. "Get out, you louse!" she cried.

"Yes, get out!" echoed the barmaid.

Mr. Wilkins got up slowly, gave Peggy one long murderous look and left the room.

"That's a gutty guy!" said Peggy contemptuously.

"All the same, watch out," said the barmaid. "He'll give you the dirt, if he can."

"If he can," said Peggy. "If he tries anything funny my boy friend will cut his liver out!" (Peggy possessed an admirable knack of suiting her conversation—particularly her vernacular—to her company.)

Not long afterwards a young man entered the bar and

said, "Hallo, darling," to Peggy. He was walking just a shade unsteadily. He was, or rather, should have been, extremely good-looking, but his complexion was mottled here and there, and his face was thin and drawn. He had very charming, kindly eyes, but the cornea were discoloured. His forehead was high and powerful, but it required more mopping than it should have done. Finally, his expression should have been cheerful, whereas it was profoundly melancholy. Both body and spirit were clearly in swift decline.

"Hallo, Arthur," replied Peggy. "Is the red light showing?"

Arthur Bault smiled wearily. "Not so very badly."

"Badly enough! What have you been doing to-day?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"That means drinking."

"Not so much." He sat down next to her.

Peggy looked him over. She was tough all right, but she had some soft spots, and she had one for Arthur. He was a soak, of course, but he wasn't an ordinary one. For one thing he had guts, by which she meant physical courage. She had seen him fight a thug who had insulted her, and that thug had been a big and dirty fighter—she had brought a siphon down on the back of his head just in time. There was nothing dirty about Arthur; unlike most booze-hounds, he was outwardly clean and tidy. Particularly she noticed his beautifully-shaped hands, of which he took good care. He smoked like a night editor, but his fingers were unstained and his nails were properly tended. Then he was in love with her and always rather sweet to her. But above all, Peggy realised the might-have-been in him. She was well paid for her services, but she would have helped him for nothing, if she'd known how. She treated him with a rough kindness.

"You don't want a drink—we'll go in and eat."

"You eat, I don't want anything."

"Don't be a ruddy young fool! You've got to eat. Come on."

They left the bar and went down a short passage into the so-called ballroom. It was a fair size, quite tolerably furnished on the hire-purchase system (six instalments overdue). The lighting was pleasant, and the decorations round the walls, a complicated galaxy of naked females, revealed considerable talent for such commercial art. In fact, the person responsible for them had once been a person of genuine artistic promise, but Old Man Brandy had decided otherwise. There was the usual dance floor, tables surrounding it, a small dispense bar, and a throne for the orchestra of five pieces. The five pieces had just come in and were alternatively tuning up and "knocking one back."

About half the forty tables were occupied, but not all, as yet, with profit, for dance-hostesses occupied a dozen of them. They were talking across to each other listlessly and hoping oathfully that their luck would be in. Their eyes roamed towards Peggy and Arthur with reminiscent bitterness; for before she had come on the scene they had nicked many a welcome note out of his so very easy pockets, and had fought fiercely for the honour of having him at their tables. They could cheerfully have rent Peggy limb from limb, but they one and all knew better than to tackle her. She gazed back at them with supreme contempt.

A moment or two after they were seated, an individual came up to greet them. This was the proprietor. Mr. Clarence Arbrillnot was his name for the time being. To the members of the club he was invariably known as "Oily," and he answered to that without rancour or hesitation. He was scraggy and cadaverous, with a horribly long neck and a general air of "shave when I've time." His breath suggested an invariably lost battle between cloves and brandy. During his fifty-three years he had attempted various minor species of crime of the speculative genus, for which he had revealed no natural flair; and a couple of spells "inside" had not served to sweeten his nature. However, when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb he had found a heaven-sent "steamer," who had

advanced him five hundred pounds on the understanding that he got his drinks at a third off the published price. Not a very sound arrangement, for they were sold at fifty per cent. over "pub prices." Actually the club was a paying proposition.

This was entirely due to the secretary, a most industrious teetotaller and very learned in night-club economics. He knew his job from A to Z, and loathed it just as comprehensively. With him Oily had what he called a working arrangement. The secretary called it a "bloody wangle." The net profits by this arrangement were divided in the proportion of seventy-five per cent to Oily and twenty-five per cent to the secretary—in theory, at least; but Oily had devised various and ingenious means for varying this split. For example, he frequently rifled the till for the mysterious purpose of "going around the commissionaires"—in other words, encouraging those functionaries by means of a little "smash" or silver coinage to direct those who would not otherwise have done so to take a taxi to the "Pink Nightie."

But the secretary had his doubts as to whether those monies were so expended. For his employer invariably came back from these excursions with an unresponsive pupil in a very glassy eye. Oily was about as attractive and honest an individual as most proprietors of night-clubs, a highly slanderous compliment.

"'Evening, 'Oily,'" said Peggy. "I want to whisper something to you."

Oily leaned down a fat red ear.

"You've had two observations," said Peggy.

The man's face revealed the utmost consternation.

"Are you sure?" he whispered back. "I thought I saw one here last Thursday. How d'you know?"

"Never mind, I thought you'd like the tip."

"Much obliged."

The meaning of this scrap of dialogue was that on two separate occasions more or less disguised policemen had visited the club and noted its various sins of omission and

commission. After which a raid was the logical conclusion.

Peggy's "information" was purely fictitious, but she knew it would have the effect of making Oily very careful. So if Arthur came to the club without her there would be no drinks after hours for him.

She ordered two steaks and two double whiskies. "And that's your ration while you're with me, my lad," she peremptorily informed Arthur.

"All right," he replies listlessly.

"How have you been?"

"I've been sleeping better."

"Has that crook Barton been bothering you?"

"Yes, he turned up at my rooms and I repeated what you told me to."

"What did he say?"

"Muttered something, and went away."

"How much did he swing you for altogether?"

"Two thousand, but that was before I met you, Peggy. When I was off my head."

"You're not too securely fastened to it now. A friend of the swine was in here to-night. If he comes back I'll point him out to you. Avoid him like King Kong."

"Peggy, you're such a darling!"

"If you think so, you'll slowly but surely cut down on the booze."

"I will try, but I've got nothing to live for."

"What about me?"

"Oh, you don't love me."

"I'm fond of you and I'll go on seeing you. Do you want me to?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"I'll go on seeing you if you'll cut down. If you don't—never again!"

By the time the waiter served them the club was full, and there was that odd symphony of sound which always fascinated Arthur: the slight hiss of the dancers' feet, echoed by the gentleman who was tickling the drum with a wire brush, the "rum-tum," splurge and howling from his

colleagues, the occasional crash of a plate or glass, muted chatter, sounds of slight altercation, the blustering, rather sinister flapping of the curtains in the night breeze, the harsh sounding of the bell, the tittering of new arrivals, the voice of a waiter raised in protest at the accusation that he had given short change, the hurried pattering up to Oily or the secretary to see what was the matter (as if they didn't know!)—all this and much more goes to compose the Night-Club Symphony. Let those who long to hear it remember the Pied Piper.

Arthur obediently forced down as much food as he could, urged on by Peggy who, for herself, needed no urging. She was deciding that he was a bit better this evening, but what a gloomy owl! Rather a dear in a way, though.

Suddenly a slight uproar started at the other end of the room. Peggy instantly diagnosed the cause—namely, that the spokesman of one table appeared to represent that point of view which resents Semitic influence on British society. The four spokesmen at the other table, who represented that influence on British racecourses, appeared to resent his remarks.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Peggy. "There's a Yid scrap starting. Let's skip. We'll go to a movie for an hour. First of all you must have your angostura and soda." She beckoned to a waiter. "One port and one angostura and soda," she ordered.

"I loathe the muck!" expostulated Arthur.

"You have got to have it." When it arrived, Peggy said, "Go and powder your nose."

Arthur got a certain masochistic delight from being ordered about by her, and left the room.

Peggy glanced swiftly round the room as she abstracted something from her vanity-bag. There was no one looking in her direction. She slipped her hand over Arthur's glass, held it there for a moment, and then dropped it back into her lap. But somebody *had* been watching. No less a person than Mr. Wilkins, who was glancing through the glass door behind Peggy's chair. When he saw what she had done an

odd and evil expression came over his face. A moment later Arthur returned.

"Drink that," ordered Peggy.

As he gulped it down, he shook from stem to stern.

"Now we'll go," said Peggy.

Some time later she dropped him at his furnished rooms in Half Moon Street. The landlord lodged and boarded him for a lavish sum per week. It was an inclusive fee, which was supposed to include three meals a day. This arrangement suited the landlord, for Arthur's breakfast only too often had consisted of a couple of pick-me-ups and a whisky and soda—and these were extras. And he was usually out for lunch and dinner. The maid was well pleased, too, for she appropriated a varying percentage of the cash Arthur left lying about, and that was about all the tidying up she concerned herself with.

When Peggy left Arthur he was almost overwhelmed by sleep. As she lightly kissed his forehead he was just sufficiently in command of his faculties to ask when he was going to see her again.

"The day after to-morrow," she replied.

Satisfied with this, he staggered to his room and flung himself down on the bed.

CHAPTER THREE

BOB dosed off for a couple of hours, incessantly looked at his watch until it was seven o'clock, and then rang up.

"Yes, sir," replied Cora. "She seems better. She's asleep now and hasn't been sick for several hours."

"I'll ring up again at one," said Bob. "If she wakes tell her I've seen Mr. Gallin. If she is well enough I'll come along directly I've run up."

"Very good, sir."

"So that was that," he thought. "No more lobsters at the Lombardy Grill!"

He could imagine the passionate protestations and

denials of the presiding genius of the place, that eclectic philanthropist, friend to all famous and wealthy persons, suave poucher of largesse, donated by those who, on an average, secured from the national dividend less than one tithe of what he put in his bank at the very suggestion that a polluted crustacean could have the sauce to insinuate itself into his domain. Actually Bob didn't, in his heart of hearts, believe it had.

At ten o'clock he was in Gallin's office and explaining the cause of his visit.

"I'm most frightfully sorry to hear it," said Gallin. "Tell her I refuse to allow her to enter this building again till she's absolutely fit. I hope I haven't been over-working her?"

"That's ridiculous," Bob replied. "In fact she often says you let her off far too lightly. You know how it is, those who work when they have no financial need to do so often feel—it is a matter of uneasy conscience, really—that they are not doing enough and are being treated as privileged. Those who work because they have to, usually consider they are being sweated and underpaid."

"Which is very true as a rule," said Gallin, smiling. "But I always knew Lucy was far too shrewd to be fooled in that way; and I've worked her just as I'd have done if she'd been an ordinary employee. I hope she's really happy here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Bob, a shade hurriedly.

"I may be wrong," suggested Gallin, "but I thought I detected a shade of uncertainty in your answer."

"I shouldn't have allowed it to be perceptible."

"Then there is something."

"Simply this. Sometimes she's felt there was a little very natural envy of her."

"Yes, I know. I know what you mean. I had half suspected it. It shall be stopped."

"You can't very well curette an emotion," said Bob smiling. "Not even Mussolini or Hitler can do that."

"But like them I can control its expression."

"There is no real expression to be controlled. Now look here, Gallin, Lucy would be furious if she knew we were having this discussion. After all, it's perfectly natural, and indeed inevitable."

"But grossly unfair."

"Not even that. Lucy is a blackleg, in a way. It is perfectly true to say that every one has a right to work, but have they the right to enjoy a large private income from the brow-sweat of their sisters at the same time? It is a very moot and difficult point."

Gallin appeared to be considering it. "You must realise," he presently said, "that women in business want very careful handling. They are strongly individualistic, and it is very difficult to get the idea of team-spirit into them."

"I am delighted to hear it," Bob said emphatically. "I loathe team-spirit. Merely goose-stepping to the bellow of a sergeant-major."

"It's natural for *you* to say that," laughed Gallin. "You can afford to. But I assure you in business it is essential."

"Oh, I know it is said to be so, but I doubt if it ever amounts to much more than a realisation on the part of the unit that it had better remember its interest is bound up in pretending to be part of a herd. Anyway, I hope women never do acquire it; I like their scratchy independence. A servile woman is a horrid thought."

Gallin was thinking, "He doesn't really know what he's talking about."

"In any case," he said, "I shall keep my eyes open; and now to change the subject to that difficult problem—Arthur. I heard from that girl who is seeing so much of him, just before you came."

"The one who dopes him, you mean?"

"I suppose it's dope of a kind. Doctor Reynolds hasn't told me what it is. I imagine it's a sedative, plus Red Bark or Gold."

"Is it working?"

"The girl says he seems quieter, and is drinking rather

less. She is very sensible and quite fond of him, and gives him plenty of good advice."

"Well, I hope *that* helps him," said Bob. "Personally I think it perfectly useless to attempt to break a bad habit by good advice, threats, or appealing to the victim's better nature. Supposing you tell him his habit will kill him? Well, he may not believe you, or he may want to die. If he's got a better nature, it must be admonishing him already. In any case, however little he may know about himself, he knows far more than any one else can. In my opinion there are only three ways of dealing with people like Arthur. Shut him up and cure him forcibly. We've no power to do that. Leave him alone and let his habit kill him. It sounds brutal, but it may be the kindest. Or attempt gently and subtly to wean him from his obsession—for that is what it is. The combination of a woman and a drug seems admirable."

"The girl says he doesn't seem to have the slightest desire to live," said Gallin sadly. "That's the devil of it, for it is both the cause and the result of his drinking."

"Quite; and therefore we must be prepared to have to accept him as a hopeless case. I drank more than was good for me when I was young, but eventually I felt so appallingly dilapidated, I reformed. How Arthur can face the dawn in his state, beats me."

"He probably faces the afternoon with a bottle of whisky, I'm afraid. Is Lucy prepared for the worst?"

"I think so, if people ever are prepared for it."

"Well," said Gallin, "give her my very affectionate regards. Of course, I'll ring up often and inquire after her. I dare say she doesn't want visitors."

"Not yet, at any rate," replied Bob. "But I'll give her your message."

As a matter of fact, Lucy's recovery was surprisingly rapid, and she was back in the office in ten days. Both Bob and Gallin tried to persuade her to take a holiday but in vain; that rather pathetic conscientiousness of the privileged person forbade her to take advantage of that privilege.

"If I were an ordinary working girl there I'd have to go back," she said.

"But you're not," argued Bob irritably. "What's the good of pretending you are! If one of those girls had your money, she'd never do a hand's turn."

But Lucy had the uneasy conscience bred of a large unearned dole, and refused to listen to him.

Miss Caligne received her with unexpected cordiality, and so did a Miss Lampson, who was in charge of the storeroom.

It is now accepted, except probably by judges and bishops, that it is a law of life that certain young women—and many not so young—cherish for each other a sentiment stronger than mere friendship. Public opinion has become quite sophisticated.

Miss Lampson simply adored Miss Caligne. She was the sweet stimulant of all her day-dreams. Miss Lampson was a fairly competent gaunt creature, forty years of age, living alone with her mother, whom she detested. She had never been within hailing distance of matrimony—no man she had met had been of so alkaline a temperament as to face her acidity. Her attitude to the girls under her, who loathed her and mocked her behind her back, was *Oderint dum Matuant*. But by some odd semi-inverted psychic—or perhaps harmonic—urge she had fallen desperately and finally in love with Miss Caligne. The latter, however, was not in the least in love with Miss Lampson. She tolerated her and was mildly amused, and perhaps a little flattered, by her adoration. Also she thoroughly believed in having as many adherents as possible, especially if they were as pliant and devoted as Miss Lampson; one never knew when they might become useful. Needless to say, Miss Lampson loathed Lucy almost as bitterly as if she had been a rival for Miss Caligne's patronage. The latter artfully stimulated this emotion. Lucy knew vaguely about Miss Lampson's sentiments towards Miss Caligne—every one in the office did.

Two days after she went back to work she had reason to visit the repair department, which was on the top floor, up

two steep and dark flights of stairs. Miss Lampson was up there too. Lucy delivered her message, was on her way down, and had just turned a corner when she was violently charged in the back. She was still feeling a bit fragile, and for this reason was holding on to the banisters on either side. This in all probability saved her life, for otherwise she would have crashed down a whole flight on to her head. As it was, she only just held on, and the strain on her shoulder muscles was terrific. She turned round with a gasp to see Miss Lampson, who burst into profuse apologies. She had suddenly remembered something she wanted to tell Miss Bault. That "something," when related, hardly seemed to justify such precipitancy. Lucy went back to her room rather shaken and irritable. For a time the picture of what might have, and so nearly had, been kept recurring to her mind. She just escaped sudden death—a formidable thought. She mustn't say a word to Bob about it. As her shoulders ceased aching, her mind regained its poise.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITHIN a week of this little incident Lucy had recovered completely, and the memory of that sharp attack had faded with the vague terrors it had aroused. The weather was much cooler, business very good, and every one at Glovfit's working at full stretch. One morning Gallin had a visitor, pert and petite, as Lucy noted. She had never seen Peggy, but imagined that this was just another lovely blonde after a job.

"Good-morning, Miss Camden," said Gallin, pulling up a chair. "How is he?"

"About the same; he isn't drinking so much. He hasn't got time, he passes out so soon. Look here, how long is it going to take? I'm beginning to feel the strain. This is the last time I'll be a dry nurse to a soak. I'm fond of him, but it's starting to tell on me."

"It's very good news that he's cutting down," answered Gallin soothingly. "As I told you, the medicine you're giving him has two effects. Firstly, to lull his desire for drink, and secondly, to soothe his nerves. Apparently it's doing both, for this 'passing out'—as you term it—is only sleepiness, and a very good sign. His cure is bound to be rather slow, but if you find the strain too great I'll try something else."

"No," replied Peggy reluctantly, "I'll stick it out. At any rate I'm saving him money. The babies at the 'Pink Nightie' were just grooming him for stardom when I took him over. He's the sort that brings that dreamy look into dance-hostesses' eyes. When I first went with him there, every one, from the boss to the girl in the ladies' toilet, came up at a hand-gallop. When I'd said my piece we were alone."

"I'm sure of it," said Gallin kindly. "I can well believe that but for you the crooks, male and female, would have stripped him to the bone. You've done very well and I'm very grateful. All I want in the world is to see that poor boy himself again."

"He's himself again every night," said Peggy. "No, that's not quite fair. Anyway, he's a gent, and by a 'gent' I mean a man a barmaid would like to talk to a second time. But you can imagine what they think of me. The damn band used to play 'Look what girls will do for pearls!' when I first went to the club with him, but I stopped that."

Gallin put his hand in a drawer and brought out a handful of notes. "Here you are, my dear."

Peggy counted them. "What! I've got a raise!"

"In recognition of your good work," said Gallin, smiling.

"Well, I'm much obliged. What was it you told me to be to him? Guide, philosopher and friend?"

"That's it," replied Gallin.

"And to think I've been called a gold-digger! Well,

bye-bye ! I'll do my best. To tell the truth, I shall miss him when we part brass-rags."

For the next hour and a half Gallin turned his attention to the new brassiere he had designed and was about to put on the market. An article of ingenious cut and nicely-calculated stresses.

Twenty ladies weighing from seven stone to thirteen-ten took part in the rehearsal, Gallin supplying a running commentary. There was much learned talk of "cups" and "darts." The ladies stared aloofly about the theatre while their bosoms were closely studied, dispassionately reviewed and pulled about. Most of them were flawless physical specimens, but, thought Lucy for the hundredth time, how boring is flesh in bulk. That flimsy envelope over complex horrors—a discovery made by all the more fastidious gentry who are engaged in the manufacturing and marketing of women's undies. Producers of revues know this too, and probably also any Eastern potentate who can still afford a harem. Borrow once had the superficially thrilling experience of seeing a thousand naked women bathing together. He seems to have found it very soporific. Any film magnate would have paid many a thousand dollars to have shot that scene—delicately shaded to have passed the censor, and expected a thunderous reaction. Yet in all probability the reaction would have very soon been merely Borrow's, and competing with the light plash of the billows would have been heard, a ripple of soft snoring, purred from the auditorium.

"Shorts and brassieres must go!" said a worthy ecclesiastic at a morality conference. "They merely draw attention to what they conceal." He must have thought deeply on the subject, for he expressed a profound truth which, if acted upon, would make it even less necessary to have morality conferences.

Bole arrived just as a séance ended, and while Lucy was getting ready, had a word with Gallin. They discussed the inevitable Arthur, and Gallin told of Peggy's visit and favourable report.

"I suppose," said Bob, "if he does pull himself together we ought to send him on a sea voyage with some sort of keeper."

"Yes, but the time for that has not nearly arrived. The girl's going to report three times a week. What she said cheered me up a lot."

"Lucy will be cheered up too," said Bob. "She seems quite well again, don't you think?"

"Fit as a fiddle," exclaimed Gallin. "And you can be sure I'm not overworking her. In fact, I am trying to prevent her overdoing it. I wish every one had her appetite for work."

There was a knock on the door, and there was Lucy looking, thought Bob, radiant and adorable. Ten minutes later they were seated at their favourite table at the Lombardy. After ordering, Bob told Lucy what Gallin had told him.

"But," said Lucy, "this woman can't go about with Arthur forever unless she means to marry him."

"Oh, I don't think that," said Bob.

"Then, when he stops seeing her and getting this stuff from her, he'll slip right back again."

"Not if the cure is complete and we can get him away from London."

"And you really think he's better?" Lucy's tone was dubious.

"Apparently he is."

"I wish I could see him."

"Better not just yet. Wait till he's got his confidence back and his improvement is plain to see. He might feel ashamed in your presence and lift his elbow to hide his face. How's everything in the office?"

"Oh, all right. The Caligne female is almost genial."

"A pose, I imagine."

"Why?"

"Surely too sudden in an unchanged situation. I'm not being a gloom, but don't trust her too far. Women can change their feelings for a man overnight recklessly and

violently, but they seldom change their minds about each other, though they are marvellously adept at pretending to."

"Oh, there you are, darling, jawing like a novelist. I bet you read that somewhere, and that it was written by an undergraduate. Just the usual generalisation about 'Women.' We're just as individualistic as men."

"You're not. Remember the Sabine ladies."

"What about them?"

"Every one of them en masse rejoiced in a new and lusty spouse. They never tried to go home again."

"How do you know?"

"I'm certain of it. If I had to paint a picture of their rape I should make it a scene of unalloyed, jocund and shameless infidelity."

"Well, if the Amazons had played the same trick on the husbands I bet you could have painted much the same picture."

"Certainly not. Some would have accepted the situation with satisfaction, very few, I imagine—some with resignation, but most would have pined away and died, but the reaction of each would have differed!"

"Well, I don't suppose she does exactly love me," said Lucy, getting back to realities. "But even a pose of peace is good enough for me."

"Keep your eyes skinned all the same," said Bob. "I don't trust that young woman not to do you a mischief if she could. By the way, Anthony Faraday wrote me from Luxor—you remember him?"

"Just vaguely; I only met him casually once or twice."

"Well, I hope you meet him many times in the future. The phrase 'best friend' is a bit boyish, but he's certainly mine."

"Then you'd better tell me more about him."

Bob looked at her sardonically. "It is traditional," he remarked, "that women are inclined to be inimical to their husbands' best friends."

"Only a novelist tradition," replied Lucy contemptu-

ously. "On the contrary, they often find them an immense relief after their boring mates, and frequently run away with them."

"They'd have their work cut out to run away with Anthony. I believe he was fond of some female once, but something went wrong and he never repeated the experiment."

"Well, tell me about him. I can just remember he was rather small, bronzed and staccato, and vaguely alarming."

"He may give that impression," said Bob, "He has a highly-concentrated mind and a complete inability to talk vivaciously about nothing."

"Do you suggest I talk vivaciously about nothing?"

"It would probably seem like nothing to him. Once upon a time he was one of the greatest diagnosticians in England, and possibly in Europe. His patients packed his ante-room, seethed in his hall, and took station on his stairs. He was reaping the income of a film star when suddenly he cancelled all his appointments and walked out of his house in Wimpole Street, never to return."

"Why?" asked Lucy. "It can't have been much fun for those he might have cured."

"A matter of temperament and an odd one. He told me he could no longer endure the look in his patients' eyes when he had to break the worst possible news to them; to sign, as it were, twenty death-warrants a week. He lacked, he thought, the true scientific temper, that caste of mind which can avidly and dispassionately observe and chronicle the changes, physical and physisic, in his best friend, which are due to a tumour on his brain. He wasn't made that way, so he chucked it all and went away on his travels. He's been on those travels, off and on, ever since."

"From the way you put it," said Lucy uncertainly, "he might be—not selfish exactly—and not exactly a prig—well, I mean after all he had a great gift and could tell people what was the matter with them and so help them, and he gave it up. Oh, I don't know!"

"A perfectly sound criticism, as he would be the first

to acknowledge. He's not in the least selfish and no one could be less a prig. It was simply this: his particular talent and his particular temperament were at hopeless odds. It's a fairly common spiritual conflict for which there is no cure. Anyway," concluded Bob, rather irritably, "he's almost a genius, always a gentleman, and I knew you'd begin to crab him just because I'm very fond of him."

"Don't be fiery and untamed, darling," said Lucy soothingly. "I'll take your word for him—he sounds too marvellous."

"So he is," grunted Bob. "And less of that girlish irony. Waiter, the bill!"

And soon after, having arranged to meet at eight o'clock, they lightly squeezed each other's arms in the manner of their kind, and separated.

CHAPTER FIVE

AFTER leaving Gallin, Peggy returned to Rupert Street, where Mr. Harter was discovered reading *Sporting Life*.

"I've had a rise in salary, sweetie," said Peggy.

"How much?"

"Five jimmies per week."

Mr. Harter showed his contempt.

"If," he said, "my bird's half the chump I think he is, you'll be lighting fags with fivers by next Thursday come Michaelmas."

"You haven't carved him yet."

"He's almost ripe."

"And then you'll have to skip. I know you will. And I hate you leaving me."

"Well, maybe for a while, duckie, but it won't be long till the smoke blows by," replied Mr. Harter reassuringly.

"And you will be faithful to me, won't you, darling? And not fall for any of those fast foreign girls. You won't go all Continental, will you?"

"Well, what about you and your knobby-livered lover!"

Peggy took a little bottle from her bag and held it up to the light. Harter glanced curiously at it.

"What the hell is that dope?" he asked.

"Search me," replied Peggy. "I'm not the doctor but it seems to work."

She leaned over to get a cigarette from a box on the table and as she did so, her other hand with the little bottle in it, struck the side of the chair. The bottle slipped from her hand and fell to the floor. The cork flew out and half its contents were spilled.

"Hades!" she exclaimed angrily. "That's bent it. Now I shall have to go back to the old fish and get another ration."

"Too bad," said Harter, yawning. "Well, I must go and get on with the good work of cementing Anglo-American friendship."

Peggy handed him the little bottle. "Shove that in the top drawer of my dressing-table," she said.

"What do you want to keep that for?"

"Just a case of 'Guess I will,'" replied Peggy. "Now I must beat it back to Regent Street."

Mr. Harter got up lazily and sauntered from the room. Peggy's fingers were already busy with the dial.

When she met Arthur at the "Pink Nightie" that evening she had another little bottle in her bag. Arthur was sitting at the bar talking to Mr. Wilkins, who swivelled a shifty eye upon her.

"Come on," said Peggy imperiously to Arthur, "you're not a member of the Prisoners' Aid Society."

"Is that funny!" said Mr. Wilkins viciously. "Or is that funny! How's the crook who keeps you?"

The answer to that question took the form of a surprisingly well-timed smack on the jaw from Arthur. Mr. Wilkins rocked off his stool on to the floor. Peggy went to the counter and chucked a glass of beer over him as he lay. Oily, who had heard the dull thud, came in.

"Ullo," he said. "What's all this about?"

"He's been bloody rude," said Arthur, trembling with rage.

Oily produced a curious penetrating whistle, surely like that which animated the bedclothes in Doctor James's tale. This time it merely produced Snoot who, grasping the situation at a glance, seized Mr. Wilkins's collar with one hand, the seat of his pants with the other, and heaved him from the premises. Mr. Wilkins attempted to laugh it off, but the sound was forced and the notes were few.

"Why were you talking to that basket?" said Peggy angrily, when they were seated in the ballroom. "Don't you know that Spotty Wilkins is just the type of tough I've warned you against?"

"Well, he came and sat next to me."

"Of course he did; he's the biggest flat-catcher in the West End, or any other end. What did you talk about?"

"Nothing much, but he asked me a funny question."

"What was it?"

"He asked me if your tonic was doing me good."

Peggy cursed under her breath. Time to change the subject. She beckoned to Oily. "Come here, Ghastly," she said, "I've got some good news for you."

"Going to pay your bill?"

"Look out for a raid any night."

Oily's face went a shade greener. "How do you know?"

"I met Buzzard, who gave me the tip. He told me not to tell you, but as you've treated Spotty with resolution I thought I would."

"That —'s barred for ever!" said Oily viciously.

"Well, I'm very grateful to you."

"I didn't like to think of porridge for breakfast every morning and bed at nine for you, Oily," said Peggy. "It'd have been three months this time."

Oily beckoned to the two waiters on duty. "Every drink off the tables by twelve-thirty," he whispered to the twain, "or I'll fire you both, pronto."

"What about tips, then?" asked one of them in a loud

voice. "We don't make a sausage out of near-beers and coco-colas."

"Shut your trap, George," said Oily, "you short-changing bum!"

"Don't you sauce me," said George, "or——" and he adopted a fighting attitude. Oily glanced round the room. The occupants of half a dozen tables were listening-in with amusement.

"So you wanna play, eh!" he said venomously.

"You 'eard," said George hotly.

"Don't shout here," said Oily. "Come into the office, you brace of blackguards."

"Let's order dinner," said Peggy when George returned with a triumphant gleam in his eye.

It was nine o'clock, the club was filling up, and the band making preparatory noises.

"I'm not hungry," said Arthur, sipping a whisky and soda.

"Oh, don't always make that fool remark," replied Peggy irritably. "You've got to eat. How many drinks have you had to-day?"

"I've knocked a few back, but I'm not in the least tight."

"Well, I'll order two salmon mayonnaise. Are you feeling any better?"

"About the same; I'm still sleeping better—or at least longer."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I feel so groggy in the morning. My heart goes bang, bang, and then stops and dashes on again. But hell, what's it matter! Drunks don't make old bones, and there won't be much moaning at the bar when I've ordered my last drink at it."

"Don't be a morbid mutt. The most boring thing about boozers is that they are always registering faked pathos. They blubber too easily. Have some guts. You've got a brain, use the damn thing. You've got nothing to do, that's your trouble."

"Oh, don't go on at me."

"I shall, because, super-sap that you are, I rather like you."

"I adore you!"

"Well, then, do as I say."

Arthur gazed at her wearily, then smiled.

"When I pop off, will you look after Sambo?"

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Peggy, exasperated. "Stop that blasted tripe. I'm sick of it."

"I mean it. Will you promise to adopt that cheap but charming puss-cat?"

"If you'll shut up I'll promise anything. Now put the stopper in the bottle and eat that fish."

The band was blaring out a ditty, the lyric of which reflected on the morals of a famous flapper:

"How could Miss Riding Hood
Have been so very good,
And yet keep the wolf from the door?"

"God, how sick I am of that bloody row," said Arthur. Peggy beckoned to Freddie, the leader of the band, who came over.

"Look here, Freddie," she said, "just because you've got the worst band in London there's no reason why it should be the loudest."

Freddie looked at her as if he'd have liked to have bashed her over the head with a blunt instrument—his piano-accordion would have done nicely. But Peggy had influence with the boss, and Archer Street of unemployed musicians was a congested area. So he just told himself quietly that she was a lousy little boiler, and played a little louder.

Peggy was annoyed and disconcerted. She had no idea she had been observed in an act which, to the habitués of night-clubs, was capable of only one construction. And Spotty knew how to be nasty about a thing like that. But Roger would look after him, and it was up to her to carry on. So she emptied the little bottle into Arthur's glass at a convenient moment. She danced a few times, ticked off

a Jew boy who tried to get fresh with her, and presently said to Arthur, "I'm bored with this dump; let's go places."

Arthur replied, yawning, "It doesn't seem any worse than usual. Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, anywhere; let's have a bottle of fizz at Okay's. You can have one glass."

(Okay's was a bottle party.)

"Will it be open?"

"Sure. I can get in. It's nearly eleven."

An hour and a half later Arthur drove home, his head nodding between his hands, but he was stone-cold sober.

At ten o'clock the next morning the maid knocked at his door, and, as usual, receiving no answer, came in rather stealthily, gave a swift glance at the bed, and then went to the dressing-table. With the assurance of established custom, she removed from it two half-crowns and a shilling. Then she pulled up the blind. On her way back to the door she glanced at the bed again. Something seemed to attract her attention. She peered closely at Arthur's head on the pillow, and then she rushed screaming from the room.

Doctor Reynolds readily gave a death certificate, so there was no need for an inquest. He had attended Arthur several times for minor ailments, his last visit having taken place only a month before his death. From the appearance of his patient he had judged that his stethoscope might tell a tale. It had. Arthur's heart was steadily losing its battle with the bottle. He hadn't, he confessed, expected it to surrender so soon, but he felt no very great surprise that it had.

On the way back from Kensal Green with Bob and Gallin, Lucy deplored once again that she had not done more for her brother.

"I can't help feeling," she said, "that there must have been *something* I could have done. As it was, I just let him go to his death."

"Now, my dear," said Gallin, "it is quite natural in a

way you should feel that, but you are absolutely free from blame. That poor boy was doomed. You heard what Reynolds said. He warned me some time ago that there was little hope. As a last chance he prescribed that stuff which he was given."

"But I thought," said Lucy sadly, "you said it was doing him some good."

"So it was," Gallin replied promptly. "He *was* drinking less, but the mischief had been done. It is doubtful, however, if he could ever have been cured, and remember the life of the man whom drink has claimed is one of misery. He feels, if he is as sensitive as Arthur, a sense of deep spiritual degradation. For brief intervals he gets a fevered, hopelessly fallacious happiness, but the reaction comes remorselessly, and more and more so. You agree, Cars-hall?"

"Oh, yes," said Bob. "His body is always screaming out its poisoned protest, and his soul is not his own. He can't face his friends, can't sleep sober or eat drunk. Slightly to alter Housman:

" ' Such ones at times are sober,
And think by fits and starts
And when they think they fasten
Their hands upon their hearts.' "

"I have met a few reformed drunkards, and by their rabid teetotalism you could tell what they had been through. I had a bit of it myself."

"Poor, poor Arthur!" cried Lucy.

"It sounds bathetic," said Bob, "but he's at rest."

Peggy was not at rest, for she received on the day of the funeral an anonymous, typed letter which ran as follows:

"DEAR MADAM,—With reference to the death of Mr. Arthur Bault, we notice no reference has been made to the 'tonic' which you have been in the habit, unknown to him, of administering to him. Rather lucky for you,

perhaps, there was no post-mortem or inquest, but bodies can be exhumed, of course, the dead can still give evidence. Possibly, if the police were told about those little bottles, Mr. Bault might be resurrected to provide such evidence. Possibly you may be interested in preventing this. If so, insert in the personal column of next Thursday's *Times* the following :

" ' Quite agree Sebastian. Should be glad to hear from again. Gladys.' "

" We really advise this, otherwise the police might learn of something which would interest them.

" ONE WHO GUESSES A LOT. "

" P.S.—How's Mr. Harter's business these days? How's he getting along with that American prospect? "

Peggy didn't like this epistle the tiniest bit. Especially the postscript. The last thing either of them wanted was any kind of contact with the constables. Wilkins was the author, of course, and he was a dangerous crook. Could there be anything in such threats?

She hurried off to Gallin to seek reassurance. She read out some of the contents of the letter to him.

" Have you any idea who sent this? " he asked.

" I'm pretty sure," said Peggy.

" A dangerous person obviously, and an educated one."

" He's educated in every dirty stroke there is," said Peggy venomously. " The worst crook in England."

" Well," said Gallin smiling, " he can't be dangerous this time. That ' tonic,' as he calls it, was absolutely harmless—just intended to calm the nerves, and to some extent to destroy the desire for drink. The very best thing that could have been prescribed in the circumstances."

" Well, of course, I thought it must have been O.K.," said Peggy. " But this lousy letter made me nervous for a moment."

" Quite naturally, but surely you can't possibly have

imagined that a doctor would have allowed you to have administered anything dangerous ? ”

“ No, I didn't really.”

“ Of course not, my dear,” said Gallin. “ Now I'm very grateful for what you did ; it can't have been a pleasant job for you. The poor boy had gone too far downhill for us to save him.”

“ Oh, I didn't mind doing it. I really got to like him and I was very sorry for him. Well, it's all over, and this is ‘ Good-bye.’ ”

Gallin got up and handed her a cheque. “ If I can be of any service to you at any time,” he said warmly, “ I shall be only too glad to. A job here, for example ? ”

“ Thanks,” said Peggy, “ both for the cheque and the offer. But I am afraid I'm not quite made that way. I can't stick regular hours and working with other females. I've tried it and I was nearly lynched several times. But if I'm in any trouble I'll come and look you up.”

When she got back to her flat, she remembered the little bottle in her dressing-table drawer. She resolved to keep it just in case of accidents, though Gallin had almost completely reassured her.

When Harter saw the letter, he mused for a while.

“ You sure it's that bloody swine Wilkins ? ” he asked.

“ Absolutely ; he used the word ‘ tonic ’ to Arthur, and here it is again.”

“ Right,” said Harter. “ Anyway, he deserves a hiding.”

And so it happened that, when Mr. Wilkins was attending the races a few days later, he found himself suddenly surrounded by a number of large and steely-eyed persons. Agonising moments ensued, and when the large and steely-eyed melted away into the throng, Mr. Wilkins had *gained* two black eyes, a large egg on his dome, and a thoroughly representative and widely distributed selection of contusions. He was *missing* three front teeth and a good proportion of his raiment. “ One Who Guesses a Lot ” guessed why.

CHAPTER SIX

Two days after the funeral Lucy went back to work. For ten days nothing occurred worth recording, but on the eleventh she had a rather alarming little experience. About noon she was going round the office, carrying out some instructions previously given her by Gallin. One of these necessitated a visit to the storeroom in the basement and concerned the dispatch to the shops of a number of new "models," artificial young females in various lengths, three-quarters, torso and bust. The sorting out of these mutilated synthetic damsels was Miss Lampson's job. Lucy sat down at her desk and began to read out to her the instructions she had received. Some of the models were on shelves behind the desk. Miss Lampson got a step-ladder, placed it by the side of the desk, and climbed up it. Suddenly Lucy felt something glance against her shoulder and almost simultaneously there was a crash. She jumped up and there was a bronze torso within two feet of her chair. A second later Miss Lampson was beside her.

"Oh, Miss Bault!" she cried, in a state of great consternation, "I hope you're not hurt."

"Not the least," said Lucy calmly, though she felt that shoulder for ten days. "How did it happen?"

"I was just turning it to see the size when it slipped off the shelf; I am so dreadfully sorry."

"It's quite all right," said Lucy, and went on reading out from her note-book. When she had finished, and as she was walking back to the door, she thought she noticed a curious expression on the face of Miss Lampson's assistant as she passed her. She put it down to the fact that Miss Coral had just witnessed—and Lucy knew that it had been so—a very, very narrow escape from violent death. From that moment Lucy was always slightly uneasy in Miss Lampson's presence, half-consciously on her guard.

On the third of June a new heat-wave began and

rapidly intensified. On the next day, a Wednesday, the thermometer was registering ninety on the shady side of Regent Street. Lucy had a busy and tiring morning and was glad to accept Mrs. Chalneys's invitation to luncheon at her flat. Bob was away for a few days playing golf at Sandwich.

"You poor dear," said Mrs. Chalneys to her when she arrived. "How simply nauseating to have to work in this weather."

"Oh, I don't mind it so much," Lucy replied, sipping a "First Night." "All the same, I darn well wish I hadn't got to demonstrate this afternoon."

"Have you really? How ghastly, in a room full of perspiring females. I can't stand our sex in bulk and indoors in this temperature. Why do you do it when you needn't? Tell them you're going to take the afternoon off."

"Oh, rot!" said Lucy with a yawn, "I'm used to it."

"You're not used to this heat—nobody is. You'll make yourself ill, I'm certain, and it's not fair to Bob."

"Oh, I'm as strong as a horse," protested Lucy. "And after all, thousands and thousands of women have to work much harder than I do and under ghastly conditions."

"Yes, but they're different and brought up differently. I know I couldn't do it and I'm pretty robust. You look out, my darling, or you'll be having a breakdown, or another of those attacks or something."

"Nonsense," said Lucy, "it's just this demonstrating that takes it out of me this weather."

"Well, tell Gallin you're not going to do it."

"I can't. The other girls have to, and they'd despise me if I yelled off."

"Let them," said Mrs. Chalneys firmly. "Oh, well, I see you've made up your mind."

"Yes, I have," said Lucy, who was bored with the subject. She changed it to clothes, which was a favourite of her hostess, together with the indiscretions of their mutual acquaintances, with which Mrs. Chalneys dealt with some wit and tempered malice.

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The lunch was excellent but decidedly rich, and Lucy ate more of it and drank more hock than she knew was wise before exhibiting a perfect figure on the little stage at Glovfit's. However, when the time came she shook off her lethargy, and though she had to make five quick changes, she was not feeling too dead when it was all over and she was drinking her second cup of tea. Then she went home to lie down.

However, during dinner she began to feel the reaction—at least she thought it was that at first—and then she began to doubt and then to get frightened. She was going to have another of those ghastly attacks! An hour and a half later she was lying half-conscious in bed and Doctor Goulby was by her side. Cora was out putting through a call to Bob at Sandwich.

When Bob received the message his face went white and he sent for his car. He told his companions, in as calm a voice as he could manage, that he had been called back to London on business, not wishing to worry them. But they were not deceived.

"Something wrong, Bob?" asked Jacob Tellon. "Is Lucy ill?"

"Yes," said Bob.

"Anything we can do?"

"Nothing, old man."

"Well, if you have time, ring us in the morning and tell us how she is," said Roy Carrett.

"I will," said Bob, and hurried away to fling his clothes into his suitcase.

When he had gone, the other two sat in silence for a long time. Presently Jacob Tellon, bachelor, said to Roy Carrett, married, "Is it worth it, my boy, this loving one woman? It seems to me a good deal more than half anxiety and trouble and unhappiness."

Roy's wife was expecting her second baby in a month and he remembered the first time vividly enough.

"Do you get more fun or fury out of golf?" he asked smiling.

"Fury."

"Will you ever chuck it? Will you or will you not be playing your two holes a day on your hundredth birthday?"

"If I can still be propped up on the tee," said Jacob.

"I've answered your question," said Roy Carrett. "And now let's have a drink—I feel damned depressed."

Bob reached Lucy's flat at a quarter-past eleven. Doctor Goulby in a fractious temper—he was ageing and had had a busy day—was awaiting him.

"How is she?" asked Bob most anxiously. "Can I see her?"

"You had better not," answered the doctor. "It is another acute attack of gastritis. The vomiting is severe."

"Is she in danger?"

"These attacks are always a cause of anxiety, but she is organically perfectly sound, and I hope the crisis will soon be over."

"Is it more severe than the other attack?"

"Somewhat," replied the doctor.

"What about a specialist?"

"My dear Mr. Carshall," the doctor's tone was testy, "I can understand your anxiety, but I can assure you I have treated many hundreds of such cases and there is nothing a specialist would change in, or add to, my treatment."

"Well, I cannot understand it," said Bob angrily and miserably. "Until this spring she has never had anything of the kind."

"It is often the case," said the doctor. "When she has recovered, she should have a thorough examination. I will arrange that."

"Have you got a nurse in?"

"She arrived an hour ago."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing whatsoever. I will be here at eight in the morning. Don't be unduly alarmed. I must be off now."

But Bob was alarmed whether duly or unduly. He sent for Cora. "Tell me about it," he said. But Cora had little to tell.

"She seemed all right till dinner-time, sir, and then got queerer and queerer, then she fainted and was terribly sick, so I sent for Doctor Goulby and rang you up."

"You don't know what she did to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Is the nurse in there now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, give me the latch-key. I'm going to put my car away and come back. You go to bed."

"Very good, sir."

Bob did not close his eyes that night. He sat in an arm-chair and thought. Not only was he almost terrified—old Goulby's efforts at reassurance had been anything but convincing—but he was profoundly puzzled. He had known Lucy since she was a child, and though her digestion had naturally not been a subject of discussion between them, no one could have looked such a picture of health and revealed such stores of energy who had any serious weakness in that direction. Yet suddenly she was stricken down with this virulent disorder. He had been alarmed by the first attack, but had more or less accepted the food-poisoning explanation. But this second seizure put a very different complexion on the first. Of course, it was just possible it, too, had been due to some such cause, but if so it was an odd coincidence. After all, Lucy's diet varied in no respect from that of thousands of other people. Yet they didn't get these appalling attacks. He knew little or nothing about disease and its cure—he was neither dead nor a doctor at thirty-eight, but there seemed something abnormal about the whole business. He shifted uneasily in his chair. Though he did not know it, his subconscious was trying to whisper a hint to his conscious, but it was not yet ready to receive the message. The first thing to do was to have this complete overhaul—that might reveal something definite—certain possibilities connected with

that word "definite" he resolutely refused to entertain. But chiefly he put his faith in Faraday, home within a few weeks now. If any one could solve the mystery it was he. Thank whatever powers there be he would soon be here! For what a ghastly shadow this thing threw over his and Lucy's future. Always to be on guard, as it were, knowing that at any moment it might strike again, and—he faced the fact, though flinching—what constitution, however strong, could resist these repeated and apparently intensifying assaults upon it? And the effect on the poor darling's mind. He had the imagination to know exactly how he'd feel in such a case, living under such a brooding menace, wondering if each little tremor of malaise was the prelude to another and fiercer onset. The nervous strain alone would be scourging, leading he supposed, either to hypochondria, recklessness or melancholia. Lucy was as much a master of her soul as any strong character, but she was highly strung and had known too little illness in her life to adapt herself easily, if at all, to such a ruthless and apparently causeless visitation. Bob had the writer's natural facility for thinking in perfectly coherent, almost punctuated sentences with phrases of precision: And he found himself repeating "apparently causeless visitation"—his subconscious murmuring again. But, of course, it couldn't be causeless, it must be caused by something, somebody—somebody, what was he talking about? He was getting sleepy! Presently the nurse, a sympathetic north-country girl who knew the circumstances, put her head in at the door. Bob got up and shook hands with her.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Miss Patten."

"Well, how is she?"

"She's getting some sleep at last."

"Tell me the truth, Miss Patten, how ill is she?"

The nurse hesitated and was annoyed with herself for doing so. She ought to have been better prepared for that question.

"Well," she said, "it's a severe attack, but she's very strong. It's really too early to say, but I am sure she'll be all right."

Bob read between the lines of this answer easily and uneasily enough.

"Tell me," he said, "this is the second attack of this sort she has had, but until recently she never had a moment's trouble of this sort before in her life. Do you have many such cases? I mean, where people suddenly develop this gastritis or whatever it is?"

Miss Patten was not prepared for this question at all.

"I will answer frankly," she said after a pause. "I have known very few. But that may be just an accident. I am not a doctor, but I imagine she is working something out of her system. Or there may be something wrong—I don't mean *seriously* wrong," she added hurriedly, "but she ought to be examined——"

"She's going to be," interrupted Bob.

"Well, then, if there is a little something wrong, it'll be found out and put right. She is so constitutionally strong—I can see that—she's sure to be quite cured. And now I must go back to my patient."

As a matter of fact, Nurse Patten was more than a little puzzled over that patient's condition, and Bob vaguely realised it.

Doctor Goulby came at eight. Bob, exhausted, almost terror-stricken, greeted him with relief, but no enthusiasm. He mistrusted his skill and competence, but he had one specialist's antipathy to interfering with another. He knew no more about doctoring than the old man knew about creating character or constructing a plot. The latter was with his patient for twenty minutes and then came back to the sitting-room.

"She's going on," he said, "as well as can be expected."

"How well's that?" asked Bob most urgently.

"Her strength is well maintained and she has had some sleep."

Bob would have liked to have kicked the old man down the stairs.

"Look here," he said, "you can be perfectly frank with me. As you know, we are engaged—I have a right to know the truth."

Doctor Goulby disliked this attempt to introduce the sentimental note; he was not going to be drawn.

"I am satisfied with her condition in the circumstances," he said.

"Tell me," said Bob with the utmost emphasis, "is she in danger of dying?"

"She is extremely ill," was the reply, "but I will not say actually in danger."

"Can I see her?"

The old boy softened a little. "I should strongly advise against it at the moment. Perhaps later in the day. Now, my dear sir, you want rest yourself, and some food, of course. Go and get both and be here at four o'clock to meet me. We will then decide if she is well enough to see you."

Bob took some of this advice, rang up Gallin, who was full of sympathy, and was back at four.

"You can see her," said Doctor Goulby, "but please only for a moment."

When Bob saw Lucy he was horrified. She was white to the lips and seemed utterly exhausted and diminished, as it were.

"Darling," she said, "don't worry, I am better, but I have been so ill. What is the matter with me?"

"As soon as you're up again," said Bob, kissing her forehead, "we're going to find that out. You're going to be thoroughly examined; it's probably just some little thing wrong which can be put right."

"Some *little* thing," she said. "It doesn't feel like that."

Her eyes closed and opened again. She smiled vaguely and took hold of Bob's hand and closed her eyes again. When he was sure she was asleep he tiptoed from the room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ONCE again Lucy's splendid constitution triumphed. In three days she was out of danger and in ten convalescent. She was then subjected to a rigorous examination, the results of which were entirely negative, in the sense that they disclosed nothing organically wrong. Sir Andrew Pultar, who examined her, told Bob that in his opinion the attacks were due to acute gastritis and nothing more. Such onslaughts, he said, were often obscure in origin and there was no reason to fear a recurrence. Bob, profoundly dissatisfied, took her and the nurse down to his cottage at Crowborough. He noticed she recovered her health far more than her spirits.

One morning as they were strolling over the golf-course, she said suddenly :

"Bob, dear, I cannot marry you."

For a moment the shock was too great for him, then he rallied himself and forced back his terror. He must keep his head.

"Now then, darling," he said, "does that mean you don't love me any more?"

"No."

"Well, then, don't talk such utter rot."

"It's this," she said, staring ahead of her. "I'm certain there's something terribly wrong with me."

"What nonsense! Sir Andrew was absolutely definite that there was not."

"And I don't believe him. Why should I get these attacks if there isn't? No, I'm sure I shall get them again and again. And that even if they don't kill me I shall become a hopeless invalid and a curse to you."

"Lucy, darling, don't be so utterly absurd. Sir Andrew told me that the effect of these attacks was immensely depressing for the time, but that that depression would pass. Myriads of people have been ill just as you were,

and have never known such trouble again. Now he's a great man, and he knows."

"No, Bob," she said tonelessly, "I can't marry you."

And something in the way she said it brought incipient panic to him. "You've got to!" he cried. "You can't do this; even if what you think were true—and it's absolutely false—I shouldn't care. I should love you just as much."

"It would ruin your life, and I know it, and I will not do it. Really, dear, I have been over and over it in my mind, and it's quite made up."

"Look here!" he exclaimed desperately, "you've heard me speak of Faraday?"

"Of course."

"Well, he'll be home in three weeks now, and, as I've told you, he's one of the greatest diagnosticians in Europe. Sir Andrew would tell you so. That means he's got a marvellous gift of discovering the causes of an obscure illness. Wait till he's seen you."

"What can he do the others haven't?"

"You can absolutely accept his verdict. He's my best friend and he'll go into your case with the greatest care. Sir Andrew's examination was thorough, of course, but Anthony will take up your case in an entirely different way. You'll be put entirely into his charge, he'll watch you continuously and he's bound to get to the bottom of this trouble. Now promise me you'll do that and not say another word about not marrying me."

Lucy was silent for a time.

"Now I have a right to ask this," Bob continued, pleadingly and yet firmly.

"I'll do it," said Lucy, "on one condition—that if he cannot find out what's the matter and I get more of these attacks, you'll let me go."

"Never mind about that; he *will* find out, and he'll cure you absolutely."

Lucy turned to him with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Bob darling," she said, and flung herself into his arms.

At that moment a figure appeared through a gorse-bush immediately ahead of them. He had already played five shots and had still a long way to go. He glanced up at Lucy and Bob and, being a sensitive person, was somewhat upset at what he saw. Bob and Lucy, rather abashed, cleared his line and tried to pretend there was nothing the matter. The sensitive person knew better, and, having played a half-hearted top with his spoon, picked up his ball and walked hurriedly on.

Lucy did not discuss the matter again during their stay at the cottage. She was affectionate enough and her spirits improved, but Bob was uneasily conscious that he had not won a complete victory. There was a hint of reserve in her manner, implying, he surmised, that the matter was not decided, but left in abeyance on the terms of their agreement. Her mother had been strong and enduring, her father weak and obstinate, a mating only tolerably possible for those who have inherited large private means. Arthur had taken more after his father, Lucy, her mother. And her apparent placidity and pliability were, he had discovered, highly deceptive. He loved that strength of purpose in her, and yet at the moment he feared it horribly.

She gave another example of it by deciding one afternoon to go back to London and start work again the next morning. Nothing Bob could urge would alter her decision.

"My dear," she said, "I have three very, very anxious weeks of waiting before me. My mind is becoming obsessed by that. I must give it something else to think about."

Bob understood it, but he had come to hate that office. It was absurd, he knew, but he could not rid his mind of some vague sense of certainty that her illness was connected with her work. He took Nurse Patten into his confidence. She was doubtful, on the whole supported Lucy, but she mustn't over-work. Not much guidance there, thought Bob. But he realised her profession bred such neutrality of decision, and that anyhow she was probably

rather out of her depth. So they packed up, and were dining together at the Lombardy by eight.

After he had seen her home, Bob rang up Gallin and told him. The latter strongly opposed Lucy's return. He seemed quite angry about it, saying that he could quite well get along without her for a time. Eventually he acquiesced, most reluctantly promising he would cut down his call on her to a minimum.

It seemed the experiment was a success, for Lucy had no relapse and gained strength. But she remained nervous, Bob noticed. Her movements were inclined to be jumpy. She frequently shook her hands sharply from the wrists, quite a new trick, and when she stood up after sitting, she often did so with a quick convulsive movement. Bob put this nervousness down to a favourable cause—her anxiety to see Faraday, which showed she had acquired a prospective faith in him—a very satisfactory symptom. She frequently asked about him and seemed greatly relieved when Bob showed her a cable from him announcing his arrival in the *Metama* on the eleventh.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AT eleven on the morning of that day the *Metama* was steaming up Southampton Water, and Anthony Faraday was strolling on the boat-deck and glancing over to the Wight. He looked just about his age, which was fifty-one. He was rather small, but spare and wiry, and gave an unmistakable impression of intellectual power and physical well-being. The expression on his finely-modelled and aquiline face was kindly but aloof—almost cold. He belonged to no accepted British type, and the insular eye would tentatively if vaguely have put him down as a "foreigner." And, indeed, his mother had been half-French and he had been educated abroad until it was time for him to come to England to take his medical degrees.

His father had been no believer in the conventional public school and university education of the British middle-classes and, though his son had been ever grateful for his time on the Continent, it had left him with an ineradicable foreign tinge to his mind, and he had never fully absorbed the English atmosphere. His mind was highly sceptical and individualistic, and he had found that part of the great strength—a strength which he never questioned—of the English genius was in its mistrust, almost amounting to minor persecution, of scepticism and individualism however many mighty rebels had flourished or perished on English soil.

But his greatest disillusionment came when he realised that the work for which he was brilliantly qualified, which he had meant to make his life's work, was intolerable to him. He made, extremely rapidly, a reputation in his profession second to none, with an immense practice. Slowly but surely the realisation came to him that he must give it all up. The strain of breaking gently to hundreds of men and women, tortured with anxiety, that that anxiety was only too justified, and that their hours were numbered, was too much for an over-sensitive spirit; he could no longer bear the look in their eyes.

One day the breaking-point came, and he left Wimpole Street for ever. His action was severely criticised; it was said that it was his duty to use his great talent for the benefit of mankind. He realised that this criticism was at least superficially just, but he could do no other.

He had never married. He liked the company of women and had no trace of sex-antagonism in his make-up. But he realised that he possessed a certain frigidity often found in the scientific temperament, and that he could not make a woman happy, at any rate the only type of woman he could conceivably have married. He had known one experience which had convinced him of that. It was an axiom of his that a man who *can* live without women *must* live without women—and he was such a man. He had de-

veloped a passion for travel, for visiting the remoter parts of the world, and England saw him but little.

He looked out over the tidy island acres and found them vaguely irritating. He had become so attuned to the wild that their trim placidity made little appeal to him. His was ever the mood of *L'envoi*; it was always his darling desire to pull out on the trail again.

One of the few things which reconciled him to returning home was to see Bob again. He had met him casually years before at a dinner of the Oddities Society, both having just been elected to that learned and waggish coterie, whereupon he had read one of Bob's books, a study in morbid psychology, and admired it considerably. It was not a work of genius, but it revealed great natural intuition. Forthwith they found some obscure but potent affinity between them. Superficially no two men seemed less likely to establish so deep a friendship, he a recluse, Bob a highly social animal, one a pessimist, the other a buoyant spirit. But so it had happened and so it had endured. That Bob was engaged, pleased him rather than otherwise. His recollection of Lucy was dim but reassuring, and Bob was not of the type to be ruined by falling in love; to become a hopelessly uxurious gramophone, fatuously reiterating his lady's largely subjective catalogue of charms. At least he didn't believe it possible. To him the function of increasing the population seemed egotistical and mildly ridiculous. But he realised it had its own sweet mystical pathos, and domesticity, he knew, was of pictorial publicity value to popular novelists; those grey bags and golf coats, pipes and bouncing babes, and the little woman smiling beside them, her hair fanned out by a summer breeze. Slightly ludicrous; but in rare moments of sentiment he knew he had missed a fundamental experience and handed over his sword to that great inexorable foe, impermanence.

By now the funnels and masts of many big steamers were visible in Southampton docks and a fussy little company of tugs were taking station to bring the *Metama* in. So he went to his cabin to see that all was ready.

Twenty minutes later he was waving to Bob, who was waving back, and the gangway was lifting to its ropes. They greeted each other without effusion, and were presently seated in a railway carriage which, since it contained others, precluded anything but conversational common-places. Faraday uttered a few about Abyssinia and related some anecdotes of his sojourn therein. Bob detailed some facts concerning the recent history of their mutual acquaintances, and was eloquent for a time concerning the imbecilities of his publisher. And then Faraday, thinking it was time the subject was cryptically alluded to, said :

"Well, my dear Bob, and how is Miss Bault? Of course I congratulate you with all my heart."

He thereupon received a sharp surprise. He had certainly expected no rhapsodies, no burst of amorous eloquence, but he had equally not expected to see a shadow on Bob's face at the mention of his lady. He hesitated a moment before answering.

"Well," he replied hurriedly, and rather uncertainly. "She's not awfully fit, to tell the truth. We'll dine together to-night, of course?"

"Certainly we will," Faraday replied.

"Well, I'll tell you about it then. As a matter of fact I have been longing for your return, but we'll talk about it later."

They returned to trivialities until the train reached Waterloo, but Faraday felt the pricking of unease. They parted at the station, having arranged to meet at Simpson's at about eight.

Faraday kept a flat in Orchard Street in permanent occupation; the occupants being a Mr. and Mrs. Bounser. Bounser, after collecting about sixty pieces of shrapnel in his person, had become his batman in France. He was a most conscientious and indomitable person, and Faraday had determined that one hero at least should never join the ranks of the ragged and forgotten legion. So he had installed him and Mrs. Bounser in his apartment, an arrangement which suited him very well, for he had a well-

equipped laboratory therein which needed certain periodic attention, and a number of valuable and much-treasured possessions which he preferred to have under permanent guard.

Mr. and Mrs. Bounser received him with that peculiarly English blend of affection and independence, which always amused and touched him. When possible, he always wrote to Mrs. Bounser once a month, and he found a large map, covering the area of his travels, pinned up in the kitchen, with little flags stuck therein, marking his route.

"Well, Bounser," he said, as the worthy fellow was unpacking, "anything happened since I've been away?"

"Well, sir, we 'ad an h'earthquake, middle of the night, sir."

"So I saw—not a bad one, though."

"No, sir, sort of a quiver like."

"Anything else?"

"They 'anged a woman, sir. Poisoned 'er 'usband."

"Well, let that be a lesson to Mrs. Bounser. Is that all?"

"They sacked the 'all-porter, sir."

"How was that?"

Bounser got very busy with the unpacking and seemed to be slightly embarrassed.

"Well, sir," he said at length, "I 'ad a scrap with 'im."

"Did you win?"

"Yes, sir, swiped 'im easy."

"What was it all about?"

"'E called me a slouch, sir," said Bounser indignantly.

"Told me I never done an 'and's turn, and the h'office sent for us, sir, and when they 'eard what 'e called me they give 'im the push."

"I congratulate you. Now get out my dinner jacket and things. I haven't worn one since I was here last; dressing for dinner in a ship always seems to me an act of vulgarity and tempting providence."

"No doubt about it, sir. Though I sees some of them Americans gets buried in their 'Tuxes,' as they calls them. Do you know why they calls them that, sir?"

"No, I don't. Why is it?"

"Don't know, sir; wondered if you did."

At ten-past eight, Faraday and Bob were seated at a corner table in the first-floor dining-room at Simpson's, and a perspiring person, robed in white, was giving a superb lesson in carving lamb on one side and a Roëderer cork had just popped merrily on the other.

"Now look here, Anthony," said Bob, "you know in the ordinary way I'd be the last person to bore you with talking about Lucy, but I have been terribly worried. The fact is she's ill. Well, I mean she has had two curious and bad attacks of something in the last two months, and she is seriously thinking of breaking off our engagement on account of it."

"Why?" asked Faraday.

"Well, she seems to think she's hopelessly infected—'doomed' is hardly too strong a word."

"Describe these attacks."

"Well, the doctors call them gastric."

"That, of course, means very little," said Faraday; "the symptoms of gastritis are common to several other complaints. Who is her doctor?"

"Goulby."

"Of Harley Street?"

"Yes."

Faraday shrugged his shoulders. "A worthy old fellow, but not exactly a genius. Marvellous bedside manner, and if a duchess says she believes a bottle of fizz a day and a trip to the Riviera would benefit her, he'll remark that that was what the doctor was about to prescribe. An absolute back-number really. Tell me more about these attacks."

"She got the first one about the beginning of May. She lunched with me and seemed all right and worked during the afternoon. It came on quite suddenly in the evening—great pain, vomiting, and all the rest of it. She's very strong and got over it all right, and then, just about a month later, she goes down with another and a much worse one. She's back at work, though she's hardly fit yet,

and, of course, she's terrified of getting a third. Says if she does she won't marry me."

"Did old Goulby suggest any cause?"

"Oh, lobster at lunch. That was the first time. But I had it too."

"That isn't conclusive, as I imagine he told you," said Faraday, smiling. "How did he explain the second one?"

"Oh, he said she hadn't properly recovered from the first, but I could see he was just stalling. He even suggested overwork!"

"Where does she work?"

"She's her Uncle Gallin's secretary. He's her only living relative, as a matter of fact. He's the owner of Glovfit's. Makes corsets and things—and a very rich man."

"I thought she had a brother?"

"She had—he's dead. To put it frankly, it was drink. We call it heart."

"She's no need to work, of course?"

"Oh, no, she's very well off, and has her brother's money, now, but she can't be idle—she's made that way. She loathes the ordinary life of girls in her position—golf, bridge, and dances and so on."

"Is she a healthy person otherwise?"

"She's never known a day's serious illness," said Bob emphatically. "In fact, being ill was to her something that happened to other people. That is what has made this so violent an experience for her."

Faraday poured out some more wine.

"Surely," he said, "she should have been thoroughly overhauled."

"I was coming to that. After the second attack she was examined by Sir Andrew Pultar."

"And the verdict?"

"Absolutely negative; he could find nothing amiss."

"And I suppose said gastritis also?"

"Yes, in a roundabout way. He said such attacks were often very obscure in origin and could not be scientifically accounted for."

"Of course that's quite true and also a piece of bluff," said Faraday. "All it really means is that *he* couldn't explain them. But they must have a very palpable origin if it can be detected. Of course, I am utterly in the dark at present, but it seems odd. One such seizure I could understand, but a second, in the case of a perfectly healthy person, certainly requires some explanation. Don't imagine I'm trying to frighten you, but such cases are rather rare."

"Well, I thought so, and I'm sure her nurse did. It wasn't what she said but her manner."

"Has she ever been out East?"

"Only to Algiers and Egypt."

"How long ago?"

"Algiers about 1925, I think; Egypt eighteen months ago."

"It's possible," said Faraday, "she got a bug there—there are some little-known ones, and some I'm sure quite unknown so far. Castellani has found several which have been named after him, one of which causes a very odd type of meta-dysentery. It rejoices in various jocund labels depending on the areas in which it is found. 'Gypsy-tummy' and 'Himalayan-Trots,' the latter beautifully descriptive of its most sombre symptom. It's just possible that Miss Bault picked up something of this sort. We'll do our best to find out."

"If anybody can it's you," said Bob. "I'm so thankful you're back."

"I'd like to see her at once if I could. Can she come to my flat to-morrow?"

"Of course."

"To lunch, I hope."

"Most certainly. She's been longing for your coming and puts the utmost faith in you. And for the Lord's sake cheer her up!"

"Of course I will."

"I'm most frightfully grateful, my dear Anthony."

"Don't be an old fool; never say that again, it bores

me. Apart from the fact that the future Mrs. Bob is of the greatest concern to me the case arouses my curiosity."

"May I ring up now and make the appointment?" said Bob, "I know she's at home."

"Hop along. Make it one-fifteen."

Bob was back in five minutes. "It's all right," he said, "I can sense the relief in her voice. And now let's talk about something else. What about Abyssinia?"

"A fascinating gallimaufry destined for that deplorable fate—to become an Italian colony, I imagine. I am no Jingo, as you know, but the British are the only race fit to exploit so-called subject peoples, and so far as I'm concerned I'd rather they kept their doubtfully clean hands off them. But the twain have met—worse luck. Yet in the end I believe tropical Africa will in very truth be the White Man's Graveyard. And how's old England?"

"Well," said Bob, "she's got the most risible Prime Minister in her history. An original captain who, having shoved his ship on to the rocks, was the first man into the boats. His days are fortunately numbered. There's one admirable portent—Sibelius is the musical pet of the moment, which may mean the end of that orgy of puerile, half-witted, pretentious bunk which has afflicted us since the war. There is a mild slump in female novelists which is also a good sign. Again there is an alleged trade boom and certain persons inspired thereby have attempted to corner a number of essential commodities. They have gone broke, which is good sign number three."

"Imagine," said Faraday, "hanging a murderer and allowing a cornerer to go scot-free."

"I know," said Bob. "One gets a drop, the other a rise—a coronet if he signs big enough cheques for the right charities."

For a time he chatted away about his books and other matters of deep import, his tongue loosened by relief and Roëderer.

When they had finished dinner, Faraday said:

"And now let us visit a moving picture—the art of the future, I imagine, of which I am hopelessly ignorant."

"There's a new *Silly Symphony* at the Tivoli," said Bob, a remark which Faraday made no attempt to decipher.

CHAPTER NINE

FARADAY was up early the next morning and took a walk in Hyde Park before breakfast. He was an uncertain sleeper, a fact to which he had become perfectly reconciled. He considered insomnia, though only in a mild form, to be a blessing; and he had often found that his brain was clearest between four and eight in the morning. It had been active between those hours on this occasion, but the problem which had occupied it had been troubling. For most certainly he had not liked the sound of that which Bob had told him. To his expert ear it had an ominous ring. He had known such cases before, and only too few had had a happy ending; and if this was to prove one of the majority—not much fun to have to break the news to Bob. He spent the time between breakfast and lunch going through his old case-books and examining those entries which seemed to resemble the clinical history of Miss Bault.

She arrived punctually and, to his amused surprise, he found himself for a moment a big gauche and embarrassed in her presence. Was it because she was Bob's woman? He registered a mental note to analyse that psychological freak, and then the expert in him took charge. A fine animal seriously out of condition was his first impression. Meant by nature to belong to the type which makes the fortunes of insurance companies, she was very far from fit; her colour, carriage, her whole physical, and to some extent psychic aura proclaimed it.

"Well, Miss Bault," he said, "I'm delighted to see you, we're not complete strangers, are we?"

"No," Lucy replied, "now that I see you I remember you very well. But would you call me by my Christian name? I always think 'Bault' a hideous word."

"Then," said Faraday smiling, "it's fortunate you're soon going to change it."

A rather strained expression came over Lucy's face.

"Whether I change it or not very much depends on you, Doctor Faraday," she said.

Bounser brought in the soup and a bottle of wine and they sat down.

"Now, my dear Lucy," said Faraday, "I understand precisely how you feel. We're going to have a purely practical talk to-day. I'm going to ask you a lot of questions, some of them may seem pointless and idiotic; you must exercise your patience."

"I can't quite see you asking an idiotic question," laughed Lucy. "Please understand I'm pathetically anxious to do all I can to help you to help me."

"Bob has told me something of what has been going on," said Faraday. "But only you can really put me wise, as the Americans say. I understand that until the beginning of May you had perfect health?"

"Certainly so."

"When you were in Egypt did you have any digestive trouble, however slight?"

"Only once—at Cairo, a sort of bilious attack and mild dysentery. Several people had it, but I soon got over it and it has never recurred."

"Now about the first attack you had. Did it come on entirely without warning or did you have preliminary symptoms?"

"Entirely without warning. As a matter of fact, though it was frightfully hot, I was feeling particularly well at that time."

"Tell me how the attack developed."

"When I got home about half-past six I had a feeling of slackness and slight sickness. I got worse very quickly and

by eight I felt really ill ; and after that I got still worse and worse."

" When you say ' worse and worse ' exactly what do you mean ? "

" I was frightfully sick and had very bad stomach pains with violent shivering, and my heart behaved in a frightening, fluttering way."

" How long did these symptoms last ? "

" About three days, but I was getting better all the time after the first twenty-four hours."

" And the second attack, was it like the first ? "

" Yes, only much more severe in every way."

" And took longer to recover from ? "

" Yes, I couldn't get up for a week."

" Now tell me exactly and in detail what you did and what you ate on the days before you got these attacks, that is if you remember."

" I remember perfectly. Before the first attack we had a demonstration in the morning."

" I'd better know exactly what that is," said Faraday, smiling, " at least so far as I'm capable of understanding."

" It's quite simple. About once a fortnight we show off our corsets and things to any one who cares to see them ; well, not any one, of course, but those on a certain selected list who receive invitations. We—I mean the models—I expect you know them as mannequins, parade up and down and show them off."

" But, you're Mr. Gallin's secretary, I understand."

" Yes, but I'm supposed to be a perfect Twenty-One. That's my waist measurement. Sounds like swank, but I suppose it's true, and I like demonstrating. It's probably a form of exhibitionism, and it's probably that which makes it rather fun."

Faraday offered her a cigarette. As she took it he noticed she snatched slightly.

" What are these corsets you wear made of ? "

" That's a dead secret, honestly I don't know."

" Do you wear them next to the skin ? You do. Have

you ever heard of any one getting ill wearing them, I mean getting a rash or anything from wearing them next to the skin ? ”

“ Yes, we have had a number of cases. They’ve all been fully gone into. And they were always persons with excessive acidity—the friction brought it out. At least that’s what we were told.”

“ When I was in practice,” said Faraday, “ I had a fair number of such cases myself, some very acute dermatitis. Will you get me one of these corsets to analyse ? ”

“ Of course I will—if you won’t tell Mr. Gallin.”

“ You can be sure of that. Now then, we are already a little ahead. What did you have for breakfast on this first occasion ? ”

“ What I always have in summer, tea and grape fruit.”

“ And after demonstrating ? ”

“ I had lunch with Bob.”

“ What did you have ? ”

“ Some lobster cooked in a special way they have at the Lombardy, galantine of chicken and salad and pêche Melba, a little hock and coffee.”

“ And went back to work ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And then ? ”

“ After leaving the office I had a cocktail with Mrs. Chalneys at her flat.”

“ Who is she ? ”

“ Oh, a very old friend of Bob’s ; she’s charming and we see a lot of her. After that I went home.”

“ I thought,” said Faraday smiling, “ tea was usually served in offices nowadays ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I had tea.”

“ Now then,” said Faraday firmly, “ that was just what I meant when I said I wanted you to tell me ‘ precisely and in detail.’ Of course, that you had tea seems to you of the most absolute unimportance. No doubt it is, but some other apparently equally negligible happening might be of the highest importance. You see what I mean ? ”

"Yes, I'm sorry. I'll try to do better in the future. Well, when I got home I began to feel funny as I have told you. I tried to eat a little dinner, but I couldn't."

"Doctor Goulby attends you, I understand."

"Yes," replied Lucy without enthusiasm.

"How did he treat you?"

"Oh, I had two or three different sorts of medicine, and had nothing but slops for several days."

"And now about the second attack."

"I had the same breakfast. I remember I had a busy morning with Mr. Gallin because he was going up to Manchester on business in the afternoon. Then I had lunch with Mrs. Chalneys; let me see if I remember what I had there. Yes, I remember some cold soup, cold lobster, cutlets and asparagus and a special strawberry sweet of hers. We had some wine, Chablis I think, and coffee. I know I ate far too much, but Mrs. Chalneys has delicious food. In the afternoon I demonstrated—it was frightfully hot and I got rather tired—so after a cup of tea I went home. I had a fried sole and asparagus for dinner and began to feel the same sort of illness about half-past eight. From then on I got worse and worse just as before."

"The first attack began about seven and the second half-past eight."

"Yes, I was quite ill by nine and was ringing up Bob, who was away."

"I understand you have been thoroughly overhauled?"

"Yes," laughed Lucy, "and I won't have another Bismuth Breakfast for you or anybody else!"

"You shan't, and the usual horrid tests?"

"Yes. I have been trained as a V.A.D. I'm not in the least squeamish about those necessary things."

"Presently," he said, "I'm going to inflict a little more of that sort of thing upon you. Now let's talk of something else. How's Bob's new book going? That's not merely a polite remark; I'm really interested in his work."

"Well, you know what he is," said Lucy. "He'll always be rather too much of a propagandist to be a great novelist."

Something upsets him, some cruelty or injustice which he may have read about in the paper that very morning, and his plot is held up by thunder on the left and everywhere else. He *has* a novelist's imagination, but he's too inclined to make his characters take sides. He clears the ring for them to tilt, but *his* man always wins. He's too much at the mercy of the things of the moment. Really he ought to write on an island where he gets no news of the outside world. I can't write a word myself, but I'm sure I'm right."

Faraday recognised that this was an acute diagnosis, so far as it went.

"I can't write either," he said, "and I only read about ten novels a year. But curiously enough it is just that propagandist element in Bob which appeals to me. Fiction is to me an oblique, disguised method by which a superior intelligence influences a posse of fools. I dare say that is quite the wrong way in which to regard the novelist's art, but it happens to be mine."

"Bob would entirely agree with you," laughed Lucy. "He has a habit of holding forth at times, especially after a visit to the libraries. I suppose if he sold thirty thousand copies he'd be more urbane and reconciled, but when he sees his royalty statements! Well, then he loudly asks why he should write for sex-starved spinsters and lusty yawning wives testing with their toes the temperature of the waters of adultery. I remember that explosion perfectly, for I told him it was horribly alliterative."

"Yes, I have had some myself," said Faraday laughing. "Tell me, why do you clench and unclench your hand like this?"

"Why," said Lucy abruptly, "I think it's because my hands get a bit numb sometimes."

"Just since you've had these attacks?"

"I think so, I don't remember them before."

"Well, I'm going now to inflict on you just another little examination. My laboratory is through there. Go in and take your frock off and when you are ready knock on the

door." Lucy did as she was told and presently there was a knock on the door. Faraday's examination was cursory, and chiefly designed to get a blood specimen without putting ideas in her head. When she was dressed and back in the sitting-room, he said :

"Now look here, Lucy, I want you to do rather a boring thing. I want you to keep a sort of diary. I want you to keep a close record of how you spend every day and just exactly what you eat and drink every day and, if you ever feel the least bit sick or ill, make a very careful note of that."

"Of course I will," she said. "But I am very careful what I eat and drink. I hardly drink at all as a matter of fact, and most of the time I eat the simplest food. When I don't, it's because Bob's fond of ordering odd things."

"Well, you must keep your diet as simple as possible," said Faraday. "Let me tell you a little story. I once had a patient, an American, who had recurrent attacks which closely resembled yours. She kept a careful record of what she ate and drank—at least she said it was careful—like yours, it was the simplest and most innocuous diet. I was completely baffled. I cross-examined her rigorously and eventually she said :

"'Oh, I forgot the alligator pears!' You've heard of them, of course."

"Yes, and they're delicious."

"To her they were a dangerous poison, so I discovered. I can't tell you why. I can tell you the chemical constituents of alligator pears, but I can't tell you why they should be a dangerous poison to perhaps one person in ten thousand. The more one examines the working of the human body the more incomprehensible in a sense one finds it. Why are eggs poison to some people? Why can some animals absorb quantities of atropine and a small dose kill a strong man? There are many, many such anomalies. I'm not saying that your case is such a one, but it is a possibility. That is why you must co-operate with me in the way I have suggested. Again, I want you to keep

in continual telephonic touch with Bob, and I will keep equally in touch with him. Very likely you will never have another attack, but if ever you feel one coming on ring up Bob at once if you're not with him, and I will be with you within an hour. You will do that?"

"Of course."

"Right," said Faraday, "it might be all-important, and you must stick at it. Just because you are feeling particularly well one day you mustn't neglect any of these things. Put down every little detail in your diary and always be within call of Bob."

He sat down at his desk and wrote for a few minutes.

"Now here," he said, "is a prescription which you might get made up at once. It's just a little something for your nerves. Also, send me all the prescriptions Doctor Goulby gave you. Pay his bill and say nothing to him about me."

"I shall be only too pleased to see the last of him," said Lucy emphatically. "He's a silly old man in whom I never had any confidence. You've made me feel a million times better already. And now I must get back to work. Thanks awfully for a lovely lunch."

"Au revoir, my dear, keep your courage up and don't plague poor Bob with silly threats of breaking off your engagement. He's terribly upset, you know."

"All right, I won't. You don't think I want to, do you?"

"No," said Faraday, "and it will never be done."

As he opened the door he noticed a very slight peculiarity in her walk. It was so slight that it would have been imperceptible to an untrained eye, but he thought he knew what it implied.

After her departure Faraday consulted his notes for a time. Lucy had been seriously ill. He was amply convinced of that. These attacks might be due to several causes. It was possible she had picked up a germ in Egypt which had been lying dormant. The blood test would probably decide that. It was possible again that she was in the early stages of organic disease. She had been tested for this, but it might have been missed. It was in a high degree

improbable, but must not be scouted for that reason.

She might again have been poisoned either accidentally or criminally, the latter seemed preposterously melodramatic and improbable, but most cases of poison seemed so, and many murderers escaped for that very reason. It might be significant that she had had lobster on both occasions. Such poisoning was a common enough occurrence. He would have accepted it as explaining the first attack, but that second one made some difference, and it seemed to him that the symptoms of multiple neuritis he had noticed, very slight though they were, were inconsistent with food poisoning. With equal determination and reluctance he set himself to consider the possibility that someone was plotting against Lucy's life. She was in business, she was rich, she was about to be married. Three possible sources of motive. Surely the financial source could be washed out—the only person interested in her money was old Bob himself. Well then, business. She had a very good job and possibly intended to stick to it after her marriage. Presumably she had displaced someone, and there were eager candidates for her position. He must investigate conditions in that office. That afternoon-tea, for example, was a perfectly feasible instrument of administration. Then she was about to be married and she might have a rival whom she had superseded, for example, that Mrs. What's-her-name, Chalneys, wasn't it? Or someone else. He knew nothing about Bob's love affairs, Lucy was the first woman they had discussed in any way. He must very tactfully sound Bob on all these matters. It was, of course, the heaviest odds against any criminal design but it had to be very carefully investigated, because, if there were, such a further attempt would almost certainly be made which might very well be fatal. And his scepticism was diluted by the fact that, when he had been in practice he had detected felonious poisoning in over twenty cases where it had been completely unsuspected. He would offer a hundred to one against it in Lucy's case, but so long as it was even a remote possibility it had to be searchingly examined.

CHAPTER TEN

HE got his hat and stick and went out, for it was a peculiarity of his that his mind worked best when he was on the move. He took a bus to St. John's Wood, and roamed the neighbourhood of N.W.3—an old favourite of his, for there Nature was still waging a brave if precarious combat with the riotous infinity of vile architecture which had challenged her. He soon realised the battle was almost lost, for everywhere vast gaunt blocks of flats had risen or were rising. Whence, he marvelled, had come the multitude to fill them? Yet still some birds were singing and some fine trees lending their shade.

Presently he found himself at the corner of the little street at the end of which rose most abruptly and satisfyingly the emerald slope of Primrose Hill. Always when he had turned that corner he had known the same little shock of surprised delight. By the time he had sauntered to the top, his sub-conscious had begun to send messages through and when, an hour later, he took a taxi outside the zoo, it had completed its dictation.

The next day he lunched with Bob at the latter's club. "Well?" said Bob anxiously when they were seated.

"Have you seen Lucy since she lunched with me?"

"No, I'm dining with her to-night."

"We had a long talk, and she told me just what I wanted to know—so far as she could tell it. I examined her in a cursory way, and took a specimen of her blood, which I tested last night. The result was quite negative. She is organically very sound—heart, lungs, everything. Physically she is a splendid creature. But inevitably these attacks have put a certain strain on her constitution, and particularly on her nervous system."

"I know," said Bob, "but tell me frankly, you didn't learn anything definite from seeing her?"

"My dear Bob, do you imagine I expected to? Of

course not ! It was just a little preliminary inquiry for providing me with some necessary data for further investigation. Often the diagnosis of obscure ailments such as this is as difficult as deciphering the ancestry of a complex mongrel, and, in a sense, it gets steadily more difficult. For in medicine as in physics, our knowledge of what is has become contracted, but our knowledge of what *may be*, greatly extended. Fifty years ago a diagnostician had a far easier job than we have to-day. He would only have taken a very few possibilities into consideration where we have to take very many."

"I see that," said Bob. "But are you suggesting that you have to take many possibilities into consideration in Lucy's case?"

"Don't be alarmed," replied Faraday, "if there are more than you realise. Tell me, is she happy in her work?"

"Yes, very, and Gallin sees she doesn't overdo it."

"I suppose there are practically all women in the business?"

"Yes, at the London office, not at the factory."

"I meant the London office. Does Lucy get on well with them?"

Bob hesitated.

"I should have thought," continued Faraday, "her position might have been a little difficult. I mean her financial and, to use a snobbish term, her social positions, are so different from those of the other women in the office. I only refer to this because Lucy's mental, psychic state must affect her physical condition."

"I quite see that, too," said Bob. "Well, as a matter of fact, there *has* been a little friction in one quarter—in the case of Gallin's former secretary whom Lucy superseded. She's got a perfectly good job—she's head demonstrator, a responsible and quite well-paid position. At the same time——"

"The nearer the boss, the better the prospects."

"Exactly; for the ambitious type. The fight for good jobs in luxury trades like that is terrific, and competition

has a thousand daughters in hot pursuit. Of course, there is also a type which thinks it's safer to be on the perimeter of the circle of which the boss is the centre."

"But I gather," said Faraday, "this young lady does not belong to that type?"

"She certainly doesn't. I wish she did."

"Is she actively hostile?"

"No, she's too cautious and cunning for that. She's rather subtly provocative, though perhaps even that's too strong a term. The fact is that there isn't a word to describe her attitude. I've read that in some tribes the men have one language, the women another, and a language common to the two. I have sometimes thought we could do with bi-sexual vocabularies. The word I want isn't quite 'catty'—and that is almost a feminine adjective, by the way. But perhaps you understand what I mean?"

"I think so. It expresses itself neither in words nor in deeds, but is ever present and unmistakable. Yet I have known men who have exhibited it."

"I think they are usually 'Pansies,'" said Bob. "I know you can't exactly blame the bitch," he continued irritably.

"But surely," said Faraday, "she must know Lucy's going to be married soon."

This suggestion did not seem to diminish Bob's irritation.

"That's just it," he said. "Lucy has the crazy idea she's going on working after we're married."

"I shouldn't worry too much about that—she won't be able to take her babies to the office. And if I read her character rightly, she is of the potentially maternal type."

"Yes, I think she is, and perhaps you're right. I sincerely hope so; I am beginning to get the horrors of that Regent Street dump."

"All the same, I'd like to see over it; something so almost completely feminine and yet absolutely commercial—an odd combination."

"It may seem so to you," said Bob, "but if a gentleman came down from Mars and walked along Oxford Street and Regent Street, he'd get the impression there was hardly a man employed in London. But, of course, you can see over the place. I'll come with you."

"And point out this disgruntled female?"

"Certainly, and if from the sources of your scientific knowledge you can find a way of sinking her without a trace, so much the better."

"I'll give my mind to it. Does she get on Lucy's nerves?"

"She does a bit—her incessant veiled hostility."

"She's no mean foe, either, I should imagine."

"If you merely called her 'unscrupulous,' 'resourceful,' 'tough guy,' 'hell-cat,' 'ugly customer,' 'gun-moll,' and a 'bloody-minded cow,' your powers of descriptive vituperation would be null and void. Oh, I feel better!" said Bob, draining a glass of Montrachet.

"Well, 'breathe awhile and then to it again,'" said Faraday, smiling. "And now to get back to Lucy. I have told her to keep a daily record of everything she does, eats and drinks. To record any slight feeling of malaise, besides certain medical matters. She is to keep in continual touch with you. By that I mean she must be able to get you on the phone at any time of the day or night. That, of course, you must arrange between yourselves. So far as possible you are to keep in touch with me. I will always keep you fully informed about my movements, and I will never be more than an hour's journey from her flat."

"Look here," said Bob earnestly, "this is going to absolutely ruin your time over here. I can't possibly allow it; it's preposterous."

"Stop it," said Faraday. "If I can put Lucy to rights it will *make* my stay over here. And quite sincerely, it won't alter my plans in the least. As you know, the English and I are not on the very closest terms. That is entirely, of course, a reflection on me. I have a few friends I want to look up and a few things I must do."

But nothing of this will prevent me keeping in touch with you."

"Well, I'm not going to thank you," said Bob in a grateful semi-grumbling way. "Will you dine with us to-night?"

"Not to-night, Bob, I've got some work to do. But will you and Lucy lunch with me to-morrow?"

"We'd love to."

"Let's have a four—I don't want Lucy to think I'm watching her all the time. She mentioned a Mrs. Chamneys, wasn't it?—as being a great friend of yours."

"Chalneys," said Bob, a shade abruptly. He was silent for a moment. "All right," he said, but without great enthusiasm.

Faraday pretended not to notice this.

"I don't think I remember hearing you speak of her. Who is she?"

"Oh, I might as well tell you," Bob blurted out with a slightly wry smile on his face. "As a matter of fact before I met Lucy we were rather close friends."

"I know that very British way of putting it," smiled Faraday. "You mean the lady was in love with you?"

"Oh, I suppose she was in a way, and I was very fond of her. I like her very much still, of course, but there are about a million ways in which a man can regard a woman, and vice versa, and they're all called 'love,' everything from sheer slap-dash lust to the most awful, exquisite and eternal adoration. She is a very attractive woman, both physically and personally, if you know what I mean. She's not exactly intelligent as we use the word but she has got a quick and femininely acute little mind and a very good sense of humour which would make her an amusing companion even without the other thing."

"My dear fellow, you sound rather absurdly explanatory and almost apologetic," said Faraday. "I imagine the combination of charms you suggest is invariably rather hard to resist."

"What a damn confirmed-bachelory way of putting

it!" exclaimed Bob. "You imagine! I wish you'd get in the toils once in your life! Well, if you like, I *had an affair* with her and I enjoyed it enormously—till I fell in love with Lucy. I suppose I'd been in love with her for years really, but I didn't realise it."

"And then it was a bit of a nuisance?"

"Well, yes. Oh, lord, what's the use of a serial universe if I couldn't dream ahead I was going to fall in love with Lucy!"

"You should have kept a piece of paper and a pencil under your pillow," said Faraday.

"I dare say, but I didn't. Well, as even *you* can imagine, there was a bit of a scene, a flock of scenes, marvellously true to fiction and a fearful strain on the nervous system. I hated telling her about Lucy all the more because I have always been sorry for her."

"Why?"

"Well, it's rather an odd story; she married a man—Chalneys, of course—about a million years older than herself. She was rather down on her luck, and he was full of the hard-earned."

"It's not an odd story so far," said Faraday, smiling.

"No, but I haven't come to that. Apparently the old bird soon became practically an invalid—and that isn't odd either. But one day he packed up suddenly, and the doctor wasn't expecting it. Well, to cut it down, it turned out that the wrong medicine had been left at his bedside. During the night he drank it, and it finished him."

"But surely," said Faraday, "no medicine had been prescribed for him of quite such lethal possibilities?"

"I'm rather hazy about the whole thing. I know he had a mania for medicines and apparently there were bottles all over the room. I believe the one he took ought only to have been taken a few drops at a time, and he swallowed about a glassful; and his heart conked out."

"Who put the bottle by his bedside?"

"Well, Mrs. Chalneys. Quite naturally she got muddled up with all those blasted bottles, and made a rather grim

bloomer. There was an inquest—and you can imagine the rest.”

“Was this in the country?”

“Yes, he had a big place near Derby. Mr. Chalneys had never got on with the locals—high priests of what they call sport who, true to type, spent most of their time shedding the blood of birds and beasts. They bored her to death, and she showed it. *There* was a lovely chance to get their own back. Old man, young wife, will in her favour, wrong bottle of medicine—and an inquest.”

“What happened at the inquest?”

“The atmosphere was a bit tense, apparently. However, the doctor agreed that with all those ruddy bottles about it was very easy to have made a mistake. He said the old man ought to have had a trained nurse, but he refused. Of course, the verdict was accidental death and Mrs. Chalneys was completely exonerated—by the coroner but not by the locals! She sold the place and came to London, but the filthy rumours followed her, and I was disgusted with the rotten deal she was getting. She wanted a friend badly, we got fond of each other—and there you are.”

“That doctor ought to have been slain with his own physic,” said Faraday. “Fancy leaving all sorts and conditions of drugs of all sorts and conditions of strength to be administered by a completely untrained person. It was criminal folly!”

“Does sound a bit such, I agree. I suppose he was a sort of rustic Goulby, and apparently Chalneys was a tyrannical old devil who would have things his own way.”

“It seems that Mrs. Chalneys came to accept her *conge* with equanimity when Lucy came along—I mean after those scenes you spoke about.”

“Oh, yes, she calmed down completely. She’s been perfectly charming about the whole thing, and so everything is all right.”

Bob’s tone was rather over-confident, thought Faraday, and didn’t ring quite true.

"Well, you've been lucky," he said. "It's not every woman who would have come to accept the situation so placidly."

"Oh, it's her sense of humour."

"However lively such a sense, it usually fails in similar circumstances."

"She's an exception. Look here, I'll ring her up this afternoon and let you know if she can come. Where shall I tell her to meet us?"

"The Berkeley, Piccadilly entrance, at about half-past one."

"Right you are—and now I must go and do some work. I'm completely stuck in my infernal book; it's all this worry and strain. I've got my juvenile lead in a pretty sticky spot, but I'd cheerfully change places with him!"

NOT FOR SALE

FREE

CHAPTER ELEVEN GIFTS TO TROOPS

WHEN Faraday got back to his flat late that afternoon he found a note from Lucy scribbled on Glovfit's paper, awaiting him. It read as follows:

"DEAR DR. FARADAY,—It's only because you told me to tell you every little thing that I am telling you this—I forgot it yesterday. Both times I had an attack I remember a funny smell which I can't put a name to. I know it sounds so silly, but there it is. I can sort of smell it in my head now, and it at once reminds me of being ill.—Yours ever,
"LUCY."

Faraday laid this missive down. He was pleased that Lucy was co-operating with him so whole-heartedly, but he attached no importance to this particular bit of information. Sick persons often entertain such hallucinations. His mind was preoccupied with other matters, with Mr.

Gallin's former secretary, and more particularly with Mrs. Chalneys. That what amounted to preferential treatment for a very well-to-do relative of the boss should cause heart-burning and friction in the latter's business was almost inevitable—it would have been surprising if it hadn't; but the case of Mrs. Chalneys was different. Quite obviously she had been in love in a sense with Bob, and his insistence that she had completely got over it had not been quite convincing; the wish had been rather too obviously the father of the recuperation. Faraday had his doubts of it. His mind meandered off into an inquiry as to how much old Bob knew about women, and at once encountered a paradox. Bob had beyond argument drawn women's characters in his books firmly and with insight. No trained psychologist could deny it. Yet that was no criterion that he would reveal high insight into the minds of the women he actually encountered. Novelists were no more successful in their relations with women than other men. In fact, often less so. Many an apparently impercipient and beefy extrovert possessed an amazing natural instinct where women were concerned. It was possible the subtler the mind the more it could deceive itself—not altogether *deceive* itself, but become over-aware of its own subjectivity, and therefore acutely suspect of itself. He yawned and with deliberation ceased to generalise. Now this Mrs. Chalneys had a history—of a sort but so far as his knowledge took him it began with her marriage to an ancient, an ancient who most conveniently struck his tent or had his guy-ropes eased off by means of a bottle of medicine—a libellous reflection—probably quite libellous. But surely old Bob must have had his moments of doubt. There he was back at Bob's mind again, a dim place like everybody else's mind. Where women were concerned there is no fool like a clever fool. Better be the biggest fool in the world than a celibate. Again, as many a time and oft, he clanged back the cage door on that tiger and a moment later was sleeping peacefully.

He had inevitably formed a mental image of Mrs.

Chalneys, and equally inevitably on being introduced to her at the Berkeley he found it ludicrously inaccurate. He had expected to find someone tall, rather sly and very dominating. He found the exact opposite, though, perhaps, the domination was there beneath the surface. However, while he believed there was some reason to rely on a man's face as an index to his character, there was practically none in the case of women. There were two living female writers for whom he had great respect. Yet the countenance of the one revealed complete intellectual nullity while that of the other displayed all the more generally accepted criminal characteristics.

The conversation was at first rather dim, almost meteorological. Bob, who seemed a shade nervous, supplied most of it. He rather elaborately explained Faraday's fame to Mrs. Chalneys. Presently the latter said:

"Of course, I have heard a lot about Doctor Faraday," which the latter knew was quite untrue, and he himself found the topic very tiresome.

"Then," he replied, "you are in a vast minority, for I'm merely a middle-aged bachelor of a morose and anti-social disposition."

"And I am always telling him he ought to get married," said Bob, in the tone of one who knows he is blurting out a banality.

Mrs. Chalneys turned her head and regarded Faraday, but not provocatively or in an over-familiar way.

"It always amuses me," she said, turning her head away again, "to hear people say that. Just as if marriage is some sort of treatment that every one should try, like sun-bathing. Yet that is notoriously dangerous for natural blondes; I'm sure marriage would be even more deadly for natural bachelors."

"But," said Lucy, "how does one know if one is a natural bachelor? Bob told me he used to think he was one."

"Perhaps he is," put in Mrs. Chalneys with a shade of malice. "He hasn't proved he isn't yet."

"Well, I know I'm not," said Bob. "But anyhow mine was a fool remark, though I do think Anthony would have made some female extravagantly blissful."

"I'm sure of it," said Mrs. Chalneys lightly, "but he might have found the process somewhat boring."

"I can see," said Faraday, laughing. "I'm being regarded as a type which is highly unflattering. But I certainly think celibacy is a mode of timidity."

"Turning one's back on the foe," interrupted Mrs. Chalneys.

"Mussolini so regards it," said Bob, "and he employs a stiff and crafty tax to round up the stragglers."

"But you can't confuse celibacy with matrimony," said Lucy.

"In a God-fearing community the terms are synonymous," said Faraday, "but if you inquisitors *must* extort the secrets of my noxious past, I very nearly did get married once. We were very fond of each other, but somehow got in each other's way, and I realised that, while I could only live with a woman whose brain was as strong as her character, I should always bicker with such a one and in the end drive her exasperated from me."

"There you are," said Mrs. Chalneys. "The sanest and most complete answer to Bob's inane remark. I'm a rare type, I had matrimony and celibacy combined."

A mildly awkward pause ensued.

"Have you ever wondered, Doctor Faraday," she continued, "what it's like to be suspected of murdering your husband?"

Faraday accepted this question easily and naturally.

"Look here," he replied, "I suppose every one has played with such ideas in a vague way, but I am fairly certain one could never know that *a priori*; I mean one would have to experience it *really* to know."

Bob was looking a little troubled.

"Look here, Agatha," he said, "I told Anthony something about it."

"Why?" asked Lucy sharply.

"Oh, just because he's a born gossip," said Mrs. Chalneys lightly. "Well, it's true; vast numbers of people still think I'm a murderess."

"From what Bob told me," said Faraday, "only malignant fools could believe it."

"Not at all," she said, "the evidence against me was quite strong, as you would realise if you examined it—as perhaps you will," she added laughing.

As a matter of fact that was exactly what Faraday was proposing to do, and he became suddenly certain this astute little lady knew it. He felt a little discomforted—the implied question was hard to answer honestly.

"It would interest me greatly to do so," he replied smiling, "but from what Bob told me it seemed to me that the material for reaching an impartial verdict is rather scanty."

"Don't you believe it," said Mrs. Chalneys with vivacity. "Pay a few visits to the stately homes of Derbyshire, and spend an hour or two with Detective-Inspector Marlon. The last time I saw him he looked like a fisherman who had just lost a forty-pounder."

Faraday made a mental note of this disgruntled sleuth's name.

"It shall be done," he remarked, in what he hoped was the right tone of banter.

Bob had had more than enough of this subject and found an opportunity of changing it. This was supplied by the entry into the restaurant of a person of aggressively aesthetic appearance who stared sublimely round the crowded room, collecting recognitions. "There's that peerless bore, Timson," said Bob. "D. H. Lawrence once drew him as an extremely unpleasant minor character in one of his novels, and he's never recovered from it."

"I suppose I ought to say I am ashamed of never having read a word of Lawrence," said Faraday, "but he appears to have founded some sort of cult. What manner of man was he?"

"I never met him," replied Bob, "but the combined

efforts of a posse of tiny bores have almost succeeded in making him into a colossal one."

"He wrote *Mornings in Mexico*," said Lucy, "and no one else living could have done it."

The conversation skirted round such topics till the clock struck three and they sought the outer air.

"Will you promise to come and see me," said Mrs. Chalneys to Faraday, as they said good-bye, "and tell me the result of your researches."

"Most certainly," he replied, "for your evidence will be essential to round them off."

In the evening he dined with friends and it was nearly midnight before he returned to his flat. He felt at once physically weary and mentally alert. He poured himself out a whisky and soda, lit a cigar and leaned back in an arm-chair. His thoughts at once began to centre round Mrs. Chalneys. She certainly had character and plenty of what the Americans describe as "intestinal stamina." Also an enigmatic aura. She had married an old man for his money—no crime, but usually resulting in psychic strain and some emotional abnormality—for it profoundly distorted a woman's sex-life—at least if she possessed the capacity for passion which he judged most certainly applied to Mrs. Chalneys. He was by no means certain that she was not still in love with Bob, and that she had not deceived him in pretending otherwise. Furthermore, she had experienced the perilous distinction of being a suspected homicide. Did she seem capable of justifying that suspicion? He was bound to confess that up to a point she did. She was obviously a woman of considerable resolution, and how probable that she had come to loathe that old man till she could not longer resist that hugely tempting opportunity. But that would not stamp her as a murderess by temperament—the vast majority of acquitted killers never killed nor desired to kill again, and, in the case of women, often became models of conventional domesticity. At the same time, if he convinced himself that she had played tricks with those medicine bottles,

he would not feel satisfied that Lucy ran absolutely no risk in her company. Why did she cultivate her successful rival's acquaintance so assiduously? Surely not from any fond affection for her! If he was any judge of character, altruism was not an ingredient of hers. He must make some inquiries of Mr. Marlon—not a pleasant duty, but a duty none the less. He had been irrationally persuaded that she expected him to do so. It was true that many persons in an equivocal position were constantly dragging the subject into their conversation to the embarrassment and boredom of their companions, but he thought she had had a definite purpose in her attitude towards him at lunch. "I know you're going to find out about me; I'll let you know that I know"—something like that. In all probability Bob had made some such remark as this to her. "We're relying on Faraday to find out what's wrong with Lucy."

Yet her attitude might be merely mischievous, for he had noticed a streak of impish humour in her—not a common trait in murderesses. But she was a determined and, being thwarted in love, a potentially dangerous woman. He yawned. Yet he knew that all this half-furtive speculation might have had its origin in a couple of bilious attacks! Time for bed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Two days later Faraday paid a visit to Scotland Yard and sent in his card to a high official of that Institution, an old friend and former patient. A few minutes later he was shown into his room. After cordial greetings and some small talk, Faraday said:

"Look here, Ned, of course I was going to look you up in any case some time soon, but as it happens I have come on a little bit of business too. I want a short talk with an Inspector Marlon."

"Of course you can have it," said the other.

"I can see you wonder why the devil I want to see him, and I'll tell you. Does the name Chalneys convey anything to you?"

"It does indeed—a very near thing for a very seductive lady."

"So I understand. Well, for certain reasons I want to discuss the case with Marlon."

"Don't tell me you've fallen for her!"

"No, but I imagine it wouldn't be difficult. It concerns a friend of mine—it's not necessary to mention names—who is also a friend of the lady in question. In a sense they are rivals and my friend has had some curious gastric attacks. Probably you have got the gist of all this vagueness."

The other looked at him very shrewdly.

"You're quite precise enough; I understand perfectly. I'll get hold of Marlon for you. Will you be in this afternoon?"

"From three till six."

"I'll see that he comes about four, if possible. If he can't manage it I'll ring you."

Faraday thanked him, arranged to dine with him a few days later and went back to his flat and a lunch Mrs. Bounser had prepared for him. He found her spouse much exercised over the foreign situation.

"I see them Jerrys is conscripting agen, sir."

"Yes, the armistice is nearly over."

"Do you think there'll be another scrap, sir?"

"Sooner or later; not just yet."

"Well, what was the good of the last one? And what did all the blokes get done in for, sir?"

"I can't quite answer those questions, Bounser; I wish I could."

"Well, sir, I 'ope they don't know nothing about it. Bit of a sell for 'em."

"I think you can be pretty sure they don't. Now I have probably got a very distinguished detective coming to see

me this afternoon. Don't look so alarmed—he's not after you this time. When he arrives, whisky and cigars."

"Right, sir."

Inspector Marlon arrived punctually at four o'clock. He was tall and rather fleshless, but his face was for a warning to the evil-doer. His eyes were piercing, his jaw most resolute, and the long scar from a bullet across his right cheek heightened his unarguably minatory appearance. A formidable fellow, thought Faraday as he greeted him, and knew from his grip the power in that right arm.

"I hope," he said, "I haven't been a great nuisance in asking you to come here."

"No, sir," was the reply, "I had nothing much on—nothing that couldn't wait."

Bounser bustled in with the drinks and smokes, and Faraday was amused at the expression on his face, denoting as it did both deference towards his employer's guest and an ineradicable distaste for the force and everything connected with it. The police, he knew, contrary to the opinion of the upper—and middle—classes, are not universally beloved by the lower—and for many good reasons.

The inspector accepted a whisky-and-soda and cigar, sat back in his chair, and waited for his host to declare his purpose.

"I understand, inspector," said Faraday, "that you carried out some investigations into the death of a Mr. Chalneys."

"Yes, sir, I did." His tone was completely official and non-committal.

"You must take my word for it," continued Faraday, "that I have a rather special reason for asking you about that case."

"Yes, sir."

"A reason it is unnecessary to refer to."

"I understand, sir," said the inspector, taking a pull at his cigar.

"I understand that his wife was under some suspicion of causing his death?"

"You can certainly say that, sir."

"I am going to ask you a very straight and indiscreet question, inspector. Do you think she was guilty? You needn't answer if you don't feel like it."

The inspector paused a moment and then replied:

"I'll put it this way, sir: there certainly wasn't enough evidence against her, not nearly enough, but I am certain she was guilty."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, she's a very strong-minded lady—not one to lose her head or get scared easily, but she near as a touch fainted when I was questioning her. She's quick-minded too, but she hesitated over her answers time and again when there was no need to hesitate. I am sure if she hadn't done it she'd have been indignant and cheeky."

"I know her very little," said Faraday, "but I should have thought that to be strongly suspected of murdering one's husband might upset the strongest character and lead to hesitating answers, to what you might call the appearance of guilt."

"In a way, sir, that's true. But I have questioned many, many suspects, and the innocent ones have always shown astonishment and indignation on their faces, and unbelief that they could be suspected. They've often had the wind-up, but it wasn't a *guilty* wind-up, if you know what I mean, sir—just fear of the police generally and of the publicity, and of what people would think, and possible arrest."

"But in the case we're discussing that was not so?"

"No, sir—she acted like the guilty ones."

"Had she much provocation—I mean was the old man a great trial to her?"

"He was a bit of an old tyrant and nuisance and, of course, being an invalid he tied her down. But he was generous with his money to her, and no worse than lots of others."

"What about the actual evidence?" asked Faraday.

"I understand it was a question of the wrong bottle of medicine."

"Well, sir, when the old man was found dead, his doctor refused to give a death-certificate, for he stated his patient had been in no immediate danger. So they cut him open and found he'd been poisoned—huge over-dose of Paraldehyde——"

"Was he quite bed-ridden?"

"That's the point, sir; he was."

"And his wife had to look after him in every way?"

"No, sir, he had a man-servant. But he wasn't allowed to touch the medicines. So there was only one way the old man could have got the poison."

"That seems rather a vulnerable inference," said Faraday. "After all, it *might* have been the man-servant for one thing."

"It wasn't, sir. She had to own she'd given him the dose."

"The bottle was surely marked 'Poison'?"

"Yes, it was."

"How many different drugs was he taking?"

"Four."

Faraday shrugged his shoulders. "All I can say is that it was scandalous. His wife was quite untrained. She had four bottles from which to pour the dose—one at least a very dangerous drug. How probable she got confused!"

"That sounds all right, sir, but she'd been giving him those four medicines for two years; she knew which was which all right!"

"That's not the point. How often do you find experienced chemists making mistakes? I've known many such cases. I'm unconvinced so far—but go on. What about the lighting in the room?"

"There was a specially bright light shining on the medicine cupboard, which she confessed she'd turned on."

"Surely she'd have stated otherwise if she'd been guilty?"

"You've put your finger on it, sir," said the inspector

grudgingly, "that was a point in her favour. But it cuts both ways; if the light was on, why didn't she notice the poison label?"

"She may have been tired. In such a state people get moments of confusion, blind spots in their consciousness, as it were. She might have been in a hurry, fussed. You must see that."

"Yes, sir. And after all she was never arrested. We saw the weakness in the case. But every one knew she wanted to be rid of the old man—she hardly disguised it. The doctor had told her to be very careful with the medicines, told her one was a dangerous drug. But it was the way she acted which convinced me she'd done it."

"Very well, I will accept that. You have had a vast experience of such matters, and I've had none. As you of course realise, I've had a motive in asking you these questions. That motive was to see if it was necessary to ask you another one. It is this. Do you think she is the type of person who might be—well, equally indiscreet again?"

"Well, sir, I have never found it a bad rule to work by that, if they do it once, they *may* do it again—if the stakes are high enough, the temptation strong enough, and they get a good chance. There are exceptions, naturally. A woman who kills a brute of a husband in desperation, or the case of murders in sudden violent passion and so on—you can wash them out. But those who actually plan one murder will very likely plan another—if they want to badly enough and they get the opportunity."

Faraday considered this all true enough, if rather obvious, but he wanted something more precise.

"I see exactly what you mean," he said. "Now, inspector, I am going to take you most strictly into my confidence. If the lady in question had a strong motive and perfect opportunity for getting rid of someone, do you think that someone might be in danger?"

"I do, sir," replied the inspector most emphatically.

"I'd certainly see she didn't go on getting that opportunity."

"I should have thought the very fact she had been strongly suspected once would have taught her a lesson."

"It may have done and it may not, sir. Plan-murderers don't reason quite like other people. You can't exactly call them mad, yet you can't call them quite normal. I can tell you, sir, there are several in Broadmoor who ought to have been hanged, and many have been hanged who ought to have gone to Broadmoor. Where insanity is in question, it's always touch and go, and largely a question of luck."

"Well, inspector," said Faraday, "I'm very much obliged to you and I won't take up any more of your time, because I am sure you're busy, but you must have one more drink before you go."

The inspector had one more drink, which disappeared in two gulps, and took his departure.

After his going, Faraday set himself to think. The inspector had expressed himself with great confidence, but he was only to be considered a man of intelligence within a certain range. It was natural to his profession to be suspicious, often extravagantly and unjustifiably so. The demeanour of persons suspected of murder was surely not so constant and consistent as the inspector suggested; and Mrs. Chalney's apparent terror might have been quite consistent with her innocence. Yet she certainly seemed a fearless and dominating character, and the circumstances of her husband's death had been indisputably dubious. Again, she had a motive for harming Lucy, and there was a certain similarity between employing a medicine glass and a cocktail glass as a mode of administration. A cup of tea was also a feasible instrument.

After a time he put down his cigar, went to the telephone and dialled a number, whereupon the following dialogue ensued:

"Hallo. Is that Mrs. Chalneys?"

"Yes. Who is that?"

"Doctor Faraday."

"Oh, how are you? I am so glad you have not forgotten me."

"Well, of course that would be impossible. I've rung you up about Lucy—I mean about those attacks she has had."

"Oh, yes, they seem most mysterious. Have you discovered the cause?"

"No, unfortunately, but one thing is very certain: she must take the utmost care of her diet. She frequently lunches with you, I understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want you to give her the very simplest food."

"Of course I will."

"And I believe she frequently comes in to have a cocktail with you?"

"Yes, and a very good one, I flatter myself."

"Well, don't make it quite such an excellent one in the future. Or, rather, make it a very weak one, very little gin and a lot of orange juice, I suggest. Mixed, undiluted drinks would be very bad for her."

"Why not cut it out altogether?"

"No, a very weak Bronx will do no harm. She'd think it odd if you didn't offer her one at all, and she might think I'd been discussing her with you behind her back—which is the case, of course. It would tend to make her nervous about her condition. You can see why. She'd think I hadn't been perfectly candid and straightforward with her."

"Yes, I quite see that, and I'll do just what you suggest. Just ordinary plain food? Anything special?"

"No; and I'm much obliged to you."

"You *must* come and lunch with me. I can assure you I'll give you something more spirited than a very weak Bronx and an invalid diet. What about to-day week?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Half-past one, then."

"I shall greatly look forward to it. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Somehow Faraday hadn't enjoyed that little chat. It

had made him feel slightly ashamed of himself. Mrs. Chalney had a charming voice which she knew how to use, and its tone had been so natural and friendly that it had seemed ludicrous to associate its owner with any sinister suspicion. And ludicrous it almost certainly was. Yet she *had* that history, and he'd have been a criminal fool if he had found Lucy on her death-bed through one of those cocktails. After all, if she were innocent he had done her no harm, and if she were not she must have taken warning. All the same he retained that mild exasperation when he went to his desk to continue his translation of *Memoirs of a Midget* into Russian, a task imposed upon him by the fact that the U.S.S.R. was to be the scene of his next pilgrimage. He happened to be convinced that it was not easy to learn the truth about a country if one could not speak one single solitary word of its language; and he cherished a profound mistrust and dislike of interpreters.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BOB rang him up at breakfast-time the next morning and asked him if he would like to visit Glovfit's that afternoon. He accepted, and they arranged to meet there at three o'clock.

"And don't forget," said Faraday, "to point out that female to me."

"Right you are," Bob replied. "When you get there, ask for Lucy."

On reaching the establishment at the appointed time he spent some moments gazing in the window. The display within it consisted of a silver-tressed "model," clad in a corset and silk tights, revolving on a turntable and raising and lowering its legs, so demonstrating the unrivalled manner in which a Glovfit's disciplined curves, chastened angles, and yet lent itself to acrobatic display. Faraday, after coming to the conclusion that this synthetic maiden

was quite the most entrancing creature he had seen since his return to England, passed through a revolving door and asked a haughty, arctic-eyed Amazon in the outer office if he could see Miss Bault with whom he had an appointment. This application was reluctantly granted, and a moment later he was greeting her and Bob.

"Gallin is going to take us round," said the latter. "Come and meet him."

He opened a door and Gallin got up with outstretched hand.

"Very glad to meet you, Doctor Faraday," he said, with a smile. "I'm afraid there's not much to see here, but you must come down to the factory soon—I think that will interest you. Sit down for a minute."

"I should like to very much," Faraday replied. "I really only came along to make your acquaintance and see where Lucy worked."

He hadn't in reality much interest in Gallin or his business, and a quick study of him did not increase it. Just an energetic, highly-competent man of business, he judged, who'd cultivated a pleasant manner of address, a type he respected—but merely a type. His expert eye detected signs of overdoing it—he looked a bit run-down and his nervous system over-strained. But in that he was also true to type—Faraday had had scores in his consulting-room.

"I hope you don't mean she is 'over-worked,'" Gallin said, smiling at Lucy. "I'm afraid these attacks of hers must make you suspicious."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," said Lucy. "You're much too easy with me."

"Best worker in my business," said Gallin emphatically. "And now come and have a quick look round the little place."

They passed through Lucy's office and, after Gallin had peeped discreetly through another door, he opened it and they found themselves on the stage of the little theatre.

A dozen young women in exiguous raiment were posturing up and down under the instructions of Miss Caligne.

Bob nudged Faraday and whispered: "The girl with the hat."

At that moment Miss Lampson came through the curtain at the back of the stage. For a moment she did not notice the intruders. Her eyes were on Miss Caligne, and Faraday was amused and instructed by the look of adoration on her face. Then she turned, noticed the group in the doorway, and hurried out again.

Gallin beckoned to Miss Caligne, who came over to them. "I take it you are rehearsing the girls for Manchester and Liverpool," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Gallin."

The latter turned to Faraday.

"These ladies are about to give demonstrations up North. They have not worked for us before, and Miss Caligne is teaching them how best to reveal the beauties of the Glovfit—carry on, Miss Caligne."

That lady, Faraday noticed, was completely self-possessed.

"Now, girls," she said, "practice that long slow stride again—remember it's to show the stretch and 'give' in these belts, and the perfect fit over the lower-back."

Lucy giggled.

"We don't usually call it that," she whispered to Faraday.

The ladies, their faces mask-like and expressionless, performed a sort of Guards' slow march. Faraday thought it one of the most solemn rites he had ever witnessed. Miss Caligne struck him as a most formidable overseer; there was a hard gleam in her eyes as she none too gently corrected the carriage of one lovely dark robot.

Presently Gallin conducted the party on to the various other departments of his domain. Faraday found it none too thrilling, but was politely enthusiastic.

"This is all new to me," he told Gallin. "The atmo-

sphere here is oddly harem-like, with you the unchallenged sultan."

Gallin laughed chattily.

"Do you know," he replied, "ninety-eight per cent of my employees are female! Who's going to marry them, heaven knows; for their potential mates are mostly unemployed."

"And very largely, I suppose, on their account," said Faraday. "It's an odd development; I don't quite see its latter end."

"No more do I," Gallin replied. "The masculine principle in this place is supplied by myself, a cashier and the errand boy. And the economic sex-war is extending even to *his* profession. Come and have some tea or a drink."

They returned to Lucy's room where she went to the telephone and ordered refreshments. Presently the door opened and a female appeared with a tray. Faraday glanced at her casually and noted she was the one who had hurried off the stage.

"Put it down here, Miss Lampson," said Lucy, and then Faraday learned something else about her—just for an instant she glanced at Lucy, and in that glance was an almost insane malignancy, obviously uncontrollable. A moment later she had left the room.

"That girl doesn't exactly love you," said Faraday to Lucy as she was pouring out.

"No," said the latter with a slightly rueful smile, "she doesn't."

Gallin glanced at her sharply and said:

"What's the trouble there, my dear?"

"Oh, she's got rather a crush, as the girls call it, on Miss Caligne," said Lucy, "and for obvious reasons rather detests me. I shouldn't have said anything about it."

"It was my fault," said Faraday. "I said it without thinking." (Which was by no means true.)

"I'm very glad you *did* mention it," said Gallin savagely. "I'll have a word with her."

He was, obviously, furiously angry.

"No, you simply *must not*," said Lucy.

"I'll fire her to-morrow!"

"Look here," said Lucy, "it doesn't worry me a bit, and she wouldn't find it easy to get another job. Please forget it. If I felt people were getting the sack on my account I couldn't go on working here another day."

Gallin seemed partially to have recovered his equanimity.

"Well," he said, "I'll give her another chance, but if she worries you in the slightest degree—out she goes."

He turned to Faraday.

"These crushes, as they're called, are inevitable where you get a crowd of girls working together. They're often extremely intense, but harmless enough on the whole, I imagine."

Faraday nodded. The information was not exactly news to him, but whether Miss Lampson was as harmless as she was intense might be doubtful, he thought.

When he left with Bob he had a word with Lucy in the passage.

"See here, my dear," he said, "I'm going to ask you to make a supreme sacrifice. Will you give up taking tea in the office?"

Lucy showed her surprise.

"Of course," she said. "But why?"

"Just take my word for it that it's bad for you—office tea has ruined a million digestions. Of course, if you like to make it at home and take it in a thermos flask, that would be all right."

"O.K., chief," Lucy answered with a smile.

She handed him a package.

"Here's the corset you asked for."

He thanked her, and with Bob went out through the swing-doors. They took a taxi to Bob's club and ordered drinks.

"Well," asked Bob, "what did you think of that woman?"

"Those *women* rather," replied Faraday. "That small shrew didn't commend herself to me."

"I never noticed her before; what a weird crush-formation those two constitute."

"A very common one, I suppose—the host, as it were commands, the parasite obeys; and I can imagine some rather odd orders passing between them."

"Yes," said Bob, "I agree with you, there's something vaguely sinister about such a combination. I shouldn't care for Lucy to be at their mercy, and I'm glad Gallin's eyes were opened a bit."

"It can't be good for Lucy to work in that atmosphere of hostility," said Faraday, "even though it's merely furtive and impotent. She'd be much better out of that office."

"Oh, I know," said Bob wearily, "but as I've told you, she's adamant. However, I swear I'll get her out of it once we're married. But when will that be?"

"If she doesn't have another attack within the next three months," replied Faraday, "I'll give her a clean bill of health, and she'll have to take my word for it that I mean it, and then get married the next day. When does she take her holiday?"

"In September. Oh, well, three months will soon pass—or will they? I shall probably be a patient of yours by the end of them."

"Don't fuss, she's getting better every day. Let's stroll back to my flat, I want to show you my Abyssinian pictures. I got the prints this morning."

When he had come and gone Faraday rang up Lucy.

"I want to see you as soon as possible, my dear," he said.

"Can you dine with me?"

"I am so sorry, but I can't," Lucy replied. "I'm dining with a friend, but I will be home by half-past nine."

"Can I see you for a few minutes then?"

"Of course. I shall be expecting you."

Faraday had been deeply impressed by that expression on Miss Lampson's face—it had revealed an almost maniacal

hatred which had completely taken charge, could not be exorcised and was definitely reckless, and dangerous to the object of it. If that woman, he decided, could do Lucy a serious mischief she wouldn't have the slightest compunction in doing so ; and would derive a deep sadistic satisfaction from so doing. Surely, he thought, Lucy must realise some of this, such palpable malignancy was unmistakable. It was high time she was out of that office, for he was convinced, extravagant though it sounded, that she might not be safe there. But apparently she was determined to stay on, and she was strong-willed to a fault. Nevertheless he was determined to get her out, and for ever, but it would take all his tact and persuasiveness. Till it was time for him to start for Basil Street he considered the best way of tackling her.

When he arrived she gave him a whisky-and-soda and cigar.

" Well, Doctor Faraday, I am delighted to see you, but I'm a weeny bit nervous. Is it something very urgent that you want to see me about ? "

" I'm not sure whether it's urgent or not," said Faraday, " but when I was in your office to-day, I received an extremely unpleasant impression."

" Miss Lampson ? "

" The woman who brought in the tea."

" Yes, that's Miss Lampson."

" And she has a crush, as you call it, on Miss Caligne ? "

" Oh, yes—it's the office joke."

" Somehow she didn't make me feel inclined to laugh."

" No, she's a pathetic old thing."

" Well, that wasn't quite the reason. Now I am going to talk very straightly to you. When I was in practice, a good third of my patients were suffering from what is called ' nerves '—that is a loose generic term for various—almost infinitely various—manifestations of psychic disturbance, some simple and quite shallow, some complex and profound. Of those nerve patients two-thirds were women, and of those two-thirds one-third at least were the

victims—if you like to put it in that way—of such crushes. The subject is, of course, more or less taboo——”

“Do you mean that people don’t talk about it,” said Lucy. “They certainly do, and to a boring extent.”

“I mean this: no play dealing with the subject can be staged.”

“It’s fairly clearly hinted at in films,” said Lucy.

“Is it? I’m surprised.”

“Well, it is always rather carefully disguised,” admitted Lucy.

“I am sure of it. I am equally sure that, when you say people talk about it, that is only true of a certain section of London society. Try and raise the topic in mixed company in Glasgow, Cheltenham or Llandrindod Wells, and I think you’d have your eyes opened as to how far it was a generally accepted subject for conversation. However, that is by the way. The fact remains that a very large number of women are reduced to what are called ‘nervous wrecks’ through the enforced suppression of what is usually a dominating and uncontrollable emotion. From my observation of this Miss Lampson I should judge that she is of that type.”

Lucy looked puzzled.

“I expect you’re right, but I don’t quite see where I come in, as it were.”

“I was coming to that. Such women are sometimes dangerous to those they have a grievance or fancied grievance against.”

“In other words, you think Miss Lampson might be dangerous to me?”

“Yes.”

An odd look came over Lucy’s face. She was silent for a time, staring out of the window. At length she said:

“Until you said that I had almost forgotten something—two things, as a matter of fact, which happened to me in the office. One day when I was coming down some stairs Miss Lampson rushed down behind me and barged hard

into me. Very luckily I was hanging on to the banisters, or I might have been killed, I suppose."

"Was there anything about that incident that struck you as curious? I mean, it sounds as if it might have been purely accidental."

"I'm not suggesting for a moment that it wasn't," said Lucy. "Until this moment I had never regarded it as anything else. But Miss Lampson's excuse for tearing down after me was that she had forgotten to say something to me. And that 'something' turned out to be so trivial and unimportant that rushing after me like that seemed fussy and silly; she could have phoned me in my office a few minutes later. Also, we are told to be very careful on those stairs, which are steep and rather dark."

"And there was another incident?"

"Yes," replied Lucy, "and equally petty." And she told Faraday of the fall of the bronze model. "Of course," she said, "it was very easy for that to happen. But Miss Lampson had no need to look at the models then—in fact, she ought to have been listening to the instructions I was giving her and making notes of them. Again, she ought to have known the size of that model without looking at it; it is her job to have those models placed on the shelves and in a certain order, and know exactly where each type and size is placed. Also it was a bit dangerous to move those heavy models about above my head. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so," answered Faraday. "She was doing something unnecessary, something she ought not to have required to do, and something that, in the result, might have killed you."

"That's it exactly. All the same, every one at times breaks almost every rule in almost every office, I imagine. Gallin is almost a fanatic about rules, and is always adding to and revising ours, with the unexpected result that the office staff make no attempt to obey them all, and they disregard the essential ones as much as the trivial."

"It amounts to this: that if you and Miss Lampson

had been on friendly terms you would have thought nothing of these incidents."

"Yes; in fact, I never thought of them as anything but purely accidental until just now. I won't say I wasn't a little upset and irritated by her stupidity both times, but that was all. But I am quite sure that that is not the only time people have been knocked into on those stairs, and not the first time models have fallen off those shelves. Both must have happened often."

"Quite," said Faraday, "but not so coincidentally, I imagine. The same one person puts the same other person in danger both times, and the former cherishes a bitter hatred towards the latter. Is Miss Lampson inclined to be careless as a general rule?"

"No," admitted Lucy, "she's not. In fact, I imagine she sticks to the rules more than any one else in the office. She's fussily pedantic about them, and is cordially disliked by all the girls under her, for that reason."

Faraday sat thinking for a time.

"Bob," he said at length, "impressed upon me how useless it was for me to attempt to persuade you to leave that office."

"That's true," said Lucy, "he's tried over and over again, but I enjoy working, and must have something to do."

"All the same," said Faraday, "I am going to make the attempt."

"It will be quite useless," said Lucy. "I have made up my mind. As soon as I am married and have enough to keep me busy at home, I'll chuck it, but not till then."

"Listen to me. It's possible—I won't say certain—that this woman has in silly, clumsy ways tried to harm you. I don't suppose for a moment she actually tried to kill you; she merely wants to get you out of your job and Miss Caligne back into it. The means she employed—if they were intentional—were just the sort of headstrong, haphazard, spur-of-the-moment means a half-crazed woman *would* employ. And we must accept two facts: one, that

on both occasions she very nearly succeeded ; secondly, that if she gets another chance she'll take it."

"I'll be on my guard," said Lucy ; "in fact, I think subconsciously I have been so since that model fell, though I never realised it till just now."

"All the same you cannot be on your guard all the time. When you are busy and running around the office you cannot always be watching out for trouble, and often your mind will be completely occupied with other things."

"I don't see much of her," said Lucy, "for days I hardly set eyes on her."

Faraday did not want to put a certain idea into Lucy's head, but he had to attempt to get his way.

"Look here," he replied, "when I say this you can take it I am in absolute earnest. I believe you may be in serious danger in that office, and I don't think it fair to Bob you should allow yourself to run such risks."

Lucy looked him very straight in the face.

"Do you *really* mean that ?"

"I have told you so. Furthermore, you promised to put yourself in my charge and follow all my instructions."

"But that was about those attacks," said Lucy.

"I said '*all* my instructions.'"

"I must confess," said Lucy, half-laughing, "you've impressed me, because you frighten me a little. So much so that I shall feel differently about that office in the future. I don't like the idea of having someone a few yards away who's longing and ready to lay me out, it's not a bit a jolly thought."

"It certainly isn't," said Faraday, pressing home his advantage, "and it's bound to be bad for your nerves. I'll go so far as to say that these attacks *are concerned* with this other business, for the nervous strain it will inevitably set up will retard your recovery."

Lucy got up and walked several times round the room. Then she resumed her seat and stared down at her hands.

"Very well," she exclaimed presently, "you've done what nobody else could do—you've over-persuaded me."

I'll leave. I don't think I'm a funk, particularly, but, if anything like that *did* happen to me, I know it would make Bob suffer a great deal, and since I promised to put myself entirely in your charge about those attacks, and you say the two are connected, I am bound to keep my promise."

Faraday felt greatly elated.

"An extremely wise, and I may say, courageous decision, he said warmly. "For no one likes reversing a long-argued decision, and no one likes to feel they are in any sense of the word running away. But you are not running away, you are taking yourself out of the reach of the venom of a maniac. I am not exaggerating—that woman is definitely insane where you are concerned."

"Then you really believe they weren't accidents?"

"I am convinced they were not; the motive plus the attempts combine to make an unanswerable argument to the contrary."

"I can't leave at a moment's notice," said Lucy. "I must have at least a fortnight to straighten things out for my successor."

"Of course; make it a fortnight from next Saturday. We'll see that the news of your resignation gets known in the office, which will almost certainly result in that virago keeping her claws in."

"Will you get Bob to tell Gallin?" said Lucy. "I don't like to, somehow. It's bound to annoy him, for we seem to work very well together, and he hates changes in the people round him."

"I'll see Bob in the morning and get him to do it."

"But not tell Gallin why," said Lucy.

"If you like, but he'll be a fool not to guess after that little scene in the office this afternoon."

"Yes," agreed Lucy, "and he's as sharp as one of his patent needles. Well, it can't be helped, and I dare say he won't sack either of them—the Caligne woman is worth a lot to his business, and he'll probably take her back as his secretary. After all it hasn't been her fault in any way, for

of course she knew nothing about it. Miss Lampson is efficient at her job, too."

Faraday had his doubts about all this, remembering that look on Gallin's face, but he did not voice them. He inquired after Lucy's general health and made a few small tests of her nervous condition. He found improvement in every way, but that there was still room for considerably more. Then he took his departure, very well pleased with his evening's work.

The next morning he sent the corset to be analysed—a routine matter from which he expected nothing. But at one time he had many 'rubber-corset' patients, who were almost at death's door through the wearing of those obsolete iniquities, and he had distrusted any sort of reducing-corset ever since. From a cursory examination of the Glovfit he had come to the conclusion that it allowed for complete ventilation of the body, but he wanted to make absolutely sure of its harmlessness. Then he rang up Bob to tell him he was coming to see him, and took a taxi to Charles Street.

He related to Bob the gist of his conversation with Lucy.

"My God!" exclaimed Bob. "Why didn't she tell me about it!—She ought to have done."

"I can quite believe," replied Faraday, "that she never till last night regarded those incidents as anything but accidents."

"That little Lampson fiend," said Bob, working himself up into a most exclamatory state of mind. "I'd like to tether her face downwards in a nest of fire-ants, and that hell-cat, Caligne, with her! I bet she puts her up to it."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Faraday, "not in so many words but by an intense use of suggestion."

"Think of the poor darling having both these blasted attacks, and a brace of devil-cows trying to kill her!"

Faraday noticed that it did not occur to Bob to link those two phenomena. After all, why should he? He himself was not in the least convinced that there was any such

connection. It amused him to realise with what sympathy—almost amounting to neutrality—Bob would probably have dealt with the business in one of his novels; what a palliating analysis he would have devoted to the ambitions of Miss Caligne and the frustrated emotions of Miss Lampson. But the charity of novelists ends at home.

"Cheer up," he said, "we've euchred them most successfully."

"I was just thinking about the next fortnight," said Bob. "As you say Gallin is almost certain to guess at the reason for Lucy's going. If he does, he'll probably give those hellcats a many-coloured cursing and the sack. They richly deserve both, but won't they try to put it across Lucy before they go?"

"Really," replied Faraday, "I think you are being rather over-apprehensive. To begin with, it's a very short period. Again, Lucy will be on her guard, and those two will have been pretty starkly warned not to try any more tricks."

"I don't trust them; they may be so mad with rage they'll risk anything."

"They have their livings to earn in the future. After all they're not gangsters, they're merely subordinate employees in a corset business."

"Shall I lie to Gallin?" asked Bob. "Tell him Lucy's going has nothing to do with those two fiends?"

"You can try it, but I'm sure he won't believe a word of it."

"Well, I don't care a damn if he does or not," said Bob. "In any case Lucy would be leaving soon, and what he cares to do with his staff doesn't matter to me. I'll hustle round and slip him the glad news. I'm immensely obliged to you, Anthony, for enabling me to do so, but, infinitely more than that, you may have saved Lucy's life."

He hurried off and was with Gallin in ten minutes. Lucy, he found, was demonstrating. Gallin's face grew dark when he heard the news.

"This is very sudden, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," Bob replied, "but Faraday is not quite satisfied with Lucy's progress."

"That's rather sudden too. He told me yesterday she was going on very well."

Bob looked—and knew he looked—rather flustered.

"Well," he began lamely, "the fact is——"

"The fact is," interrupted Gallin, "Doctor Faraday has a very sharp eye, and the fact is he noticed a look on Miss Lampson's face yesterday, and the fact is that he knew what that look implied, and the fact is he decided that it would be bad for Lucy's nerves to continue to work in such an atmosphere of hostility? Am I right?"

"Well," replied Bob, "I suppose that is roughly the sequence of events."

"Yes," said Gallin savagely, "I'm certain of it; I've had my suspicions for some time—especially that Caligne woman. Let me tell you something, my dear Robert—she belongs to a well-known and commonplace type in this sort of business. They are highly competent and very hard working, but they go into business with one idea: to compromise or marry, or both, the boss. I don't blame them in theory, but in practice they're dynamite—to a weak man. Miss Caligne *can sell corsets*—that's why I have kept her here—but she hasn't any interest in this business or any other, saving so far as it gives her a fine chance to get her hooks in the boss, or, in a bigger firm, some wealthy member of it. Don't talk to me about women in business! They are either tea-swilling robots, echoes of adventuresses, crooks, blackmailers, if they get the chance. I've had twenty-five years of 'em. Treat 'em kindly! Stroke a rattlesnake's tail! Now take this Caligne woman—as you know she was my secretary for a time before Lucy, and I marked her card. A stupid little designing fool. I used to watch her, watch her making her cod-fish, insinuating eyes at me, thinking she'd seduce me into keeping her—as if I cared a damn for any woman—I mean," he said, apparently pulling himself together, "I mean like that in that way. Tell me, have these two done anything *actively* hostile to Lucy?"

Bob had been more or less flabbergasted by this fiery outburst. He hummed and hawed and gave the show away.

"Come on," said Gallin. "I must know; it's my business and I have a right to know."

Bob, almost in spite of himself, told of the two incidents, after which Gallin seemed beside himself with fury.

"I'm much obliged to you for telling me, my dear Bob. My God! I'll let them have it—the blasted bitches! I'll fire them and I'll fix them! They won't find it so easy to get another job—without a reference or a testimonial to their valuable services. I'll fling them back in the gutter where they belong!"

"Look here," said Bob, "I'm sure that would upset Lucy. She'd hate to think of people getting the sack on her account. Once she's gone, things will be all right. After all I suppose both these two are useful to your business; can't you keep them on?"

"No," exclaimed Gallin, "I'll put them through it! Look at it this way: what about Lucy's successor? They might try the same games with her. Now, Bob, if I get rid of them, wouldn't it be all right for Lucy to stay on till she gets married? When will that be, by the way?"

"It entirely depends on her health. If she doesn't get another attack and goes on all right for another three months, Faraday says he will give her a clean bill of health, and then I suppose we shall get married immediately. Please don't ask her to stay on, Stephen; she's not fit yet, and I believe that—in spite of all your kindness—she's got rather a horror of this office. It's perfectly natural. It is now associated in her mind with murderous hate. She'll stay on for a fortnight—three weeks, I dare say, if necessary, but after that I am going to get her out of London and give her a complete rest down at Crowborough."

Gallin drummed his fingers on the desk and stared out of the window.

"Of course," he said, "I understand how *you* feel, and I hope you understand how *I* feel, having been the unwitting

cause of subjecting Lucy to all this beastliness. I can assure you, if I had known a hundredth part of this, I'd have flung those two out months ago."

"My dear fellow," said Bob, "you haven't been in the remotest degree responsible. So far as working with you has been concerned, Lucy has been very happy indeed."

"Well, Bob," said Gallin, "so be it. She shall go after a fortnight—to my very great regret."

"See you again soon," said Bob, and went his way.

As soon as he had gone Gallin forced a button down on his private switchboard, took up the receiver, and said:

"Send Miss Caligne and Miss Lampson here at once—What? I don't care a damn whether she's demonstrating! Ask Miss Bault to carry on, and send her here at once."

A few moments later there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," said Ballin in a tone which Miss Caligne recognised only too well. She entered with Miss Lampson.

For a full quarter of a minute he glared fixedly at them. The women felt the full menace of that unblinking stare. Miss Caligne rallied against it; Miss Lampson wilted and broke.

"So," said Gallin venomously, "*that's* been your little game!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Gallin?" said Miss Caligne, returning his stare.

"I mean this: Miss Bault leaves here in a fortnight and you two leave on the same day—and without a reference. Do you see any connection between those two facts?"

"None at all," replied Miss Caligne.

"Then I will point it out. Firstly, you are a brace of perverts. Secondly, you, Miss Caligne, cherished the fatuous hope that I'd have you back as my secretary—you, an incompetent tart! Thirdly, Miss Bault has had two narrow escapes from death in this office. If I could have you slapped in gaol, nothing would give me greater pleasure."

"I'll go at once," said Miss Caligne. "I can only suppose you're mad."

Gallin sprang to his feet and made as if to strike her. With an effort he controlled himself and sat down again.

"You will stay till Saturday fortnight," he said viciously. He pressed a button on his switchboard and picked up the receiver.

"Jenkins, how much commission is owing to Miss Caligne?"

There was a moment's pause.

"Thank you," said Gallin, replacing the receiver.

"You're owed fifteen pounds ten shillings. If you go before I kick you out you won't get a farthing of it. Now go!"

"Oh, Mr. Gallin!" cried Miss Lampson.

"Get out!" shouted Gallin, his temper flaming up.

When Miss Caligne and Miss Lampson were ten yards down the passage, the former took the latter by the shoulders and shook her till her arms ached, her nails driven deeply in. Miss Lampson started to cry out. Miss Caligne stopped that by a vicious blow on the mouth with her clenched fist. Then, her eyes blazing, she went back to her room. Miss Lampson staggered to the ladies' toilet and flung herself down, sobbing hysterically.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE next ten days were in a sense uneventful. Bob didn't consider them so, for during the course of them he swept triumphantly over that Becher's Brook in his novel which his imagination had refused so many times, and safely negotiated the last of those Swilcan Burns of construction, which seem so narrow, shallow and innocuous to the novice, but to the mature craftsman are the most insidious of snares.

Lucy, perfectly herself again, was busier than ever

before in her life, for handing over a job to another, even if matrimony and not the sack is the cause, is an exasperating labour. However, her nerves were steady, her spirits high.

Faraday spent much of the time renewing his acquaintance with those few friends of his he felt would really like to see him again. Also he enjoyed an excellent lunch with Mrs. Chalneys.

The Season was over and, therefore, "London was empty," in other words rather fuller than usual, for packed trains were spewing a multitude upon its streets from every terminus.

And then came July the twenty-ninth.

On that day Lucy got up at eight to face a blazing morning—another and more remorseless heat-wave. As she lay in her bath, she was thinking delicately but robustly of her lover. Darling old Bob! She had tortured him in a way, but he'd been very sweet about it, and, as she would most certainly torture him again in the future, he'd better get used to it. And very soon she'd be married to him. "Married"—in spite of mocking titters from around the British Museum, it was still a big word. She smiled to herself in a reflective anticipatory way, and glanced down at that Perfect Figure, soon to be in his arms—and happy ever after? Well, why not! It seemed to her that her whole body was passionately demanding its destined due. Meanwhile, she'd got to do a hard day's work and, amongst other jobs, demonstrate for the last time. An hour later she was taking down Gallin's letters. He hurried through them, for he was spending the afternoon at the factory. She lunched on a sandwich in her room.

Usually demonstrations were over by the second week in July, but Gallin wanted to display once more his very latest holiday models, including his masterpiece, a gossamer feather-weight to be worn under a bathing-costume, in which Lucy looked more than slightly divine. However, she had to make five changes and it was sticky and tiring

work. And after that she had to instruct her successor in her duties till after five.

When she left the office she went to Mrs. Chalneys's flat.

"The very last demonstration!" she exclaimed as she flung herself down on the settee.

"I expect you're damned glad," said Mrs. Chalneys.

"Oh, I don't know. If you're a stodgy thing of habit like me, any breaking of one brings the reminiscent tear to the eye. In a way I've been happy there, and got a cheap thrill out of having my carcass admired."

"There's always sun-bathing," replied Mrs. Chalneys. "And very soon someone besides yourself will have a chance of realising its full perfection."

"I say, Agatha, I don't want to be rude, but aren't your cocktails losing their nerve a bit?"

"I hadn't noticed it. Let me give you a spot more gin."

"Yes, that's better. My girl friends, Caligne and Lampson, leave on Saturday too."

"How odd. Anyway, wish them the worst of luck from me."

"Oh, I don't know, poor creatures. As a matter of fact it isn't odd or a coincidence; they're going *because* I'm going."

"So Gallin found out?"

"Yes. They've been regarding me with all the genial and sisterly love displayed by a star when someone else runs away with the play."

"Well, you've finished with them; forget them."

Lucy gave a little shiver. "Don't say that; there are three more days."

"What about it?"

"I'll tell you. They've tried to slay me twice."

"Tried to kill you!"

"Yes," and Lucy related the two curious incidents.

An enigmatic expression came over Mrs. Chalneys's face as she refilled Lucy's glass.

"My dear," she said with a very uncharacteristic

earnestness, "If I were you, I'd never enter that office again."

"Oh, rot!" replied Lucy. "I was only joking. Of course they can't do anything before lunch time on Saturday. Besides, I've got to clear up."

"Take my advice and clear *out*. When a certain type of woman hates as they do, they're utterly reckless. They forget everything but their desire for revenge. I belong to that type. You don't. Those who belong to that type have what us usually-called the Latin Temperament—a silly phrase, but you know what I mean. I see you don't. Well, keep your eyes wide open every second. Does Gallin know?"

"Yes, Bob blurted it out."

"No wonder he's fired them. I thought he merely knew they loathed you. Why didn't he fling them out then and there?"

"My dear, he had to fill their places."

"Who's getting yours?"

"The factory manager's secretary, temporarily."

"And now for the trousseau, and the last few hectic virgin days. And then the summons of the organ and the soft surrender of the fortress."

Lucy detected the note of bitterness in her voice and felt a shade ill-at-ease.

"Bob's capitulation will take place in a registrar's office," she said awkwardly. "No prelude to disillusionment will be played for us."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Chalneys almost angrily. "No one could help being happy with Bob—or with you," she added. "Have you fixed the jocund day?"

"Second week in October—if I don't get another of those hellish attacks."

"Of course, you won't. Anyway, you've got Faraday."

"Do you know," said Lucy, "I've got almost too much confidence in that man. I hate to think that soon he won't be at my beck and call. I'd like to cart him about as my court physician."

"I can understand it. That self-control—the gods' greatest gift."

"Which they dole out with a stingy fist," said Lucy.

"Bob's got it," said Mrs. Chalneys.

"Oh, yes—perhaps too much for a novelist."

"Nonsense! I should think any artist would be the better for it."

"But is Bob an artist—or just quite a capable novelist?"

"Of course he's an artist," replied Mrs. Chalneys sharply.

"Well, perhaps he is," said Lucy. "Anyhow that isn't what I love him for. I must be off, my dear."

"Dining with Bob?"

"Yes. We might all lunch together to-morrow. I'll ring you about eleven. Fare-thee-well!"

It was half-past six when she reached her flat. Bob was not fetching her till a quarter to nine, so she took off her frock and lay down. She dozed off and presently woke with a start. She was shivering slightly and she knew she was going to be sick. With a rush came the terrifying, ghastly certainty that the beast within her had struck again. She rang frantically for Cora.

"Cora," she said as calmly as she could, "I'm afraid I'm going to be ill again. Get Mr. Carshall on the phone."

Bob had been working hard all day, and at eight o'clock was just about to dress when his telephone bell rang. He took off the receiver.

"Hallo, darling," he said. And then his face changed and his hand shook.

"Don't worry, darling. I know where Anthony is. He'll be with you in no time. After I've rung him, I'll come straight to you."

Faraday had been rather tempted to accept a friend's invitation to spend the night at his house near Basingstoke. He had been in most of the hottest spots on the globe, but he found the foetid, petrol-reeking, twice-breathed air of London during a ninety-three degrees in the shade heat-wave almost intolerable. It was a thousand to one against Lucy having another attack during the next

twenty-four hours. But the self-discipline of a life-time quietly overcame that small temptation, and to his dying day he had the liveliest cause to be grateful for it. The system worked perfectly. He was at his club when Lucy rang Bob, and Bob knew it. He stopped for a moment at his flat to pick up a bag and was at Lucy's bedside within half an hour. Bob was sitting by her and Faraday whispered to him to wait in the sitting-room.

Lucy was conscious but in growing mental and physical distress. She was nauseated, sweating and in great pain. Faraday was as perplexed as alarmed by her condition. After taking her temperature he was on his way to the bathroom to rinse the thermometer, when he knocked against a chair on which Lucy had thrown her under-clothing and corset. The latter fell to the floor. He picked it up and suddenly stiffened. He put it to his face as if examining it closely. Then a look of comprehension and decision came over his face. He turned abruptly to Cora.

"Luke-warm bath at once," he said peremptorily.

Cora hurried off and returned in a few moments.

"It's ready, sir."

Faraday picked up Lucy and carried her to the bathroom, where he gave Cora certain instructions. Then he carried Lucy back to bed. He took a hypodermic from his bag, together with a phial.

A little later he went to the sitting-room, which Bob was pacing, his terror in his eyes.

"How is she?" he asked, trying to control his voice.

"It's a sharp attack, and she will be worse before she's better. But I believe I was in time to save her."

"But what is it? What is it?" cried Bob.

"Don't ask me now. I have a theory which may or may not be the right one. Don't ask me now. Be patient. When will that nurse be here?"

"Any moment now. I'll be patient, but I'm nearly off my head!"

"I know," said Faraday gently, "but if all goes well, I may have some very good news for you."

At that moment the bell rang. It was Miss Patten. Faraday introduced himself.

"Now, Bob," he said, "go and get something to eat and several stiff drinks. Come back when you've had them. I want a word with nurse." Bob reluctantly obeyed.

When he had gone, Faraday said: "Sit down, nurse, I have something very serious to say to you. I can, of course, absolutely rely on your discretion."

"Yes, sir."

And then Faraday talked very seriously to her for a quarter of an hour. He noticed she did not appear greatly surprised at what he said.

"You suspected it?" he asked.

"In a way I did, sir."

Faraday took a note-book and pen from his pocket and wrote for some moments.

"Here are your instructions," he said, "I shall be back within an hour."

He took a taxi to his flat, got some sandwiches from Mrs. Bounser and rang up a Harley Street number. He had a long colloquy with the owner of that number, occasionally making notes on a pad. He appeared satisfied when he replaced the receiver. He then hurried back to Basil Street.

He had been right when he said Lucy would be worse before she was better. All through that night he fought for her life, and, what he had not told Bob, that fight took some winning. Had he arrived an hour later, that fight would probably have been lost. As it was, the succour he lent her to reinforce the fearful struggle of her body to conquer that which brutally assailed it just saved her. Nurse Patten fought out the issue devotedly with him. When he sounded Lucy's heart at eight the next morning, he believed the crisis was past. So he told Bob, who had spent the night in the sitting-room, and looked almost as ill as his patient.

At nine-thirty Faraday was passing through the swing-doors of Glovfit's. He informed the janitress, who, in spite of the temperature and the early hour, looked more like Mussolini in skirts than usual, that he wished to see Mr.

Gallin. He was haughtily instructed that Mr. Gallin never arrived before ten o'clock. Then he would wait in Miss Bault's office. Miss Torborn, for whom a sly Rolls Royce called every evening—she was a Baroness in her own wrong—recognised authority when she saw it, and showed him in. Directly the door was closed he softly opened the door into Lucy's dressing-room, glanced round and picked up something from the table and came quietly back. He tapped the little tin he had retrieved, and placed some of its contents on his tongue. Then he spat into his handkerchief and slipped the tin into his pocket. A quarter of an hour later Gallin came in.

"Hallo, Doctor Faraday!" he began, and then he looked anxious.

"Nothing wrong with Lucy, I trust?"

"I'm sorry to say there is; she is very ill indeed."

"Good God! Come into my office. What, the same sort of attack?"

"I imagine so; it is the first I have seen."

"But what can be the cause? Can't you discover, Doctor Faraday?"

Faraday hesitated. Should he tell Gallin of his suspicions? Well, they were a good deal more than that. What good would it do? Yet, perhaps, he ought to know. . . .

"As you know," Gallin continued, "I am her only living relative and feel terribly responsible."

Faraday became very still. He stared out of the window for a while. Presently he said, "I have not discovered the cause, but it appears to be some form of poisoning."

"Poisoning!"

"Food poisoning, I presume. But as I say, I am still in the dark. This attack, in its suddenness and violence, is something I have very rarely encountered. In fact, I have only known three cases at all comparable with it. And yet in a sense they could not be compared with it at all."

"Why is that?"

"Because those other three were all cases of poison criminally administered."

"But surely you're not suggesting . . ."

"I certainly am not," interrupted Faraday. "I stated that in this respect Lucy's attacks are entirely different."

"And yet the symptoms are identical?"

"At any rate very similar."

"What was the poison used in those cases?"

Faraday was silent for a moment. "Strychnine," he said presently.

"Strychnine!" exclaimed Gallin, his intense astonishment plain to see. "You mean to say Lucy has the symptoms of strychnine poisoning?"

"Yes. But, of course, that is merely a coincidence—though a very curious one. And now I must get back to her at once."

"You can be certain," he added, "that I shall not rest till I have discovered the cause of these attacks. I may be baffled now, but I shall not always be."

"I hope with all my heart you won't," said Gallin emphatically. "Give her all my sympathy. Let me know as soon as she is well enough to see me."

"Most certainly, but it will not be yet awhile."

After his departure Gallin leaned back in his chair and stared at the wall before him. His expression was that of one greatly puzzled and somewhat troubled. Presently he got up and went into Lucy's room.

Faraday found Lucy slightly better, but still very ill. The strain on her heart was severe, but it was holding out well. She was fully conscious, though utterly exhausted. There was still that look of terror and misery on her face.

"My dear," said Faraday, "be reassured. You're going to get well, and you'll never be ill like this again."

"But how do you know?" she asked faintly. "How can you say that? You don't really mean it, do you?"

"I swear it. Don't ask me more now. But your permanent cure is absolutely certain."

Some of the fear and wretchedness faded from her eyes, and she closed them and slept.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IN the afternoon Faraday went out walking through the parks, down the Strand and up the hill to St. Paul's. His mind was busy on the way. Someone had been making ingenious and original attempts on Lucy's life—someone in Glovfit's. Until that morning he had been certain that it was Miss Caligne and her parasite, now he was not quite so sure. Why had he made that ridiculous reference to strychnine? He had done so simply on the spur of the moment because he had suddenly realised that Gallin was Lucy's next of kin, and certain possibilities that fact entailed. Certainly that mention of strychnine had taken Gallin starkly aback, but that might be because he knew the symptoms of strychnine poisoning sufficiently well profoundly to doubt that Lucy had exhibited them. As Lucy's only surviving relative he was her heir, if she had not made a will, which was highly probable. Certainly he was a very rich man, but it was just possible that he was insatiably avaricious, though subtly disguising the fact. But *was* it certain, Faraday asked himself, that Gallin was a very wealthy man. The information had come to him merely by hearsay, which it had never occurred to him to question. But the time to question it had come. Lucy was comparatively a very rich woman. She had her own and her brother's money. Suddenly Faraday halted abruptly in the middle of the Mall. Her brother! What did he remember about him? He had been a heavy drinker who had died suddenly, so far as he remembered, and Lucy's fortune had been doubled thereby. That sudden death must be investigated. It was, of course, all odds on the guilt of the woman and yet—Gallin didn't look like a murderer for money. "Look like" was an absurdly loose phrase, but nothing about him seemed consistent with his being a callous, calculating poisoner. Nor had he an acquisitive face. Apparently he lived with great simplicity,

and had few, if any, interests outside his business, which was more than flourishing. He had opportunity certainly and the means of securing the poison, but apparently he had no motive whatsoever, except for the highly speculative possibility of securing a sum of money of which he was apparently in no need. Yet again, the mode of attack on Lucy had been subtle and recondite. Could Miss Caligne have sufficient scientific knowledge to employ it? That question asked another; how much such knowledge had she had the chance of acquiring? If he knew anything about characteristic facial expressions she was a woman of great strength of will, complete egoism, and a certain compressed, if limited, intelligence. That is to say if she knew what she wanted she'd find the way to get it if it was in any way within her capacity to secure. She would have no capacity or desire for acquiring knowledge for its own sake, but she'd be a "quick-study" if she knew exactly what she wanted to learn, and that knowledge was within her range and power of obtaining. Yes, she *could* have worked out that ingeniously diabolical plot, and she had the bitter remorseless hate to carry it through. The idea of Gallin's guilt began to fade from his mind. It was a sound scientific law always to accept the solution which offered the fewest difficulties and with the greatest economy of doubt fitted itself to the problem to be solved.

By then he was just opposite Charing Cross Station, and suddenly something plumped down before his feet—a wallet, apparently well-stocked. Faraday suppressed a smile as he stooped to pick it up. As he had expected, a young man of charming and ingenious aspect was walking just ahead of him. There was something vaguely anticipatory about that young man's quick glance round. Faraday lightly tapped his shoulder. When he saw the wallet in Faraday's hand his own went to his breast pocket. At once his open countenance registered intense relief and gratitude.

"I think you've just dropped this," said Faraday.

"My dear sir," said the other with deep feeling, "I'm

most frightfully grateful to you. It isn't every one who'd have been so honest, and I may tell you there's two thousand pounds in this wallet."

"Well, well," replied Faraday, "I'm so glad to have been of such service to you. But isn't it rather risky to carry so much money about with you? There are some pretty tough characters about this part of the world I understand."

The young man who had made a profound study of tones of voice, recognised a tinge of irony in Faraday's. He grinned with genial impudence, shook Faraday warmly by the hand, and rapidly disappeared in the throng. Detective Skinner removed his gaze from a jeweller's widow, shot a sharp glance at Faraday and retired oathfully down Villiers Street.

Faraday reached his objective and took a taxi back to Lucy's flat where Bob was awaiting him.

After examining her, Faraday considered Lucy out of danger. The most dangerous symptoms had almost disappeared and she was able to retain the very lightest food. The expression of acute terror had left her face. He told Bob he could see her for a few minutes, and took the nurse with him into the sitting-room.

"Has your patient talked at all," he asked.

"A little, sir."

"Does she suspect anything?"

"She's puzzled I think, sir, but too weak to worry much."

"If she questions you—and she almost certainly will—just say you understand she has some obscure germ against which I can successfully inoculate her. Be vaguely reassuring. Tell her that I am satisfied she'll never have another attack, and, by the way, you must keep in touch with me, and be absolutely discreet—not a word to any one."

"Very good, sir."

"And now fetch Mr. Carshall out. I'll be here again between ten and eleven to-morrow morning. You'll be able to get a proper sleep to-night."

"My God," said Bob, when he reappeared, "how ghastly she looks."

"You ought to have seen her at five o'clock this morning. Never mind her looks, she's making marvellous progress."

"Thanks to you."

"Well, it's my job. Let's go and dine; I want to talk to you. I suggest Brook's—it's quiet."

They took a taxi to St. James's Street and secured a corner table.

"Now Bob," said Faraday as they were sipping some excellent sherry, "I'm going to take you into my confidence up to a point, but for certain reasons, which I think are good ones, only up to a point. The fact is Lucy's attacks have been due to poison."

Bob stared at him.

"Do you know, Anthony," he said, "I believe all the time I vaguely suspected it!"

"Well, three separate attacks have been made on her life. The poison used was arsenic."

"By those cursed devils at Glovfit's?"

"Very probably. Of course that means she will never be in danger again, and her recovery, though it may be slow, will be certain."

"You're absolutely sure?"

"I think I can say so."

"How was the poison administered?"

"How can I say! Now I am going to ask you a few questions which may surprise you. They concern her brother."

"What on earth has he got to do with it?"

"Probably nothing, but tell me about him."

"Well, to put it bluntly there's drink in the family, and that's an inherited disease isn't it?"

"Most certainly, and a very virulent one."

"It was so in this case, and apparently like hæmophilia it was only inherited by the melancholy males. Old Bault, his father, a brilliant money-maker and preserver died of it at sixty. Arthur was a sip of the old bottle. In a way he

was a charming and rather intelligent youth, but on first hearing the popping of corks at Cambridge he started to surrender to the urgings of heredity. He was sent down for various bibulous ingenuities ; then he was ploughed for the Air Force which he was crazy to join ; and that finished him."

" Had he got a definite thirst or was it just disappointment ? "

" As I say I think he had a strong tendency, but would have pulled himself together."

" Then he was a curable case ; there are discreet nursing-homes for such."

" Of course, but do you think we could have got him into one ! The very suggestion made him shout with laughter. He had a strong will—also inherited."

" Then nothing whatever was done ? "

" Yes, something was attempted, something you may think rather odd."

" What was it ? "

" Well, old Reynolds, his doctor, prescribed some dope, and got a girl he was keen on to put it in his drink."

" It certainly does sound a bit unorthodox, but it may have been the only hope. How was it worked exactly ? "

" It was done through Gallin. The doctor gave him the stuff and he gave it to the girl. She used to seize her opportunity to smuggle it into his glass."

" I see," said Faraday, " and what was the result ? "

" He seemed rather better for a time, and then conked out in his sleep one night."

" Was Reynolds—is that Reynolds of Devonshire Place ? "

" Yes."

" Well, was he surprised at his sudden death ? "

" In a sense yes, just a little. He knew Arthur had an alcoholic heart, or whatever you call it, but he didn't realise he was in such immediate danger."

" But he had no hesitation in giving a death certificate ? "

"Oh, no, at least I don't think so."

"You say a girl used to administer this dope. What sort of girl?"

"Oh, a dance-hostess at one time I think, I don't know what she does now, but I believe she lives with a man with some money."

"It does seem rather a dubious arrangement to get a young woman of that type to administer a drug in a public place to a wealthy young man with a weak heart."

"I agree—I never liked it, but it seemed the only way and better than nothing."

"Did Reynolds suggest it?"

"I suppose so."

"You see what I mean. There's no proof that the stuff Reynolds prescribed was the same stuff the girl gave young Bault."

Bob stared at him.

"I certainly see what you mean," he replied slowly, "but I don't think she was the sort of girl to do anything like that."

"Did he leave her any money?"

"He didn't make a will; all his money went to Lucy."

"Poor dear," said Faraday, "I expect she's felt like making her will lately."

"Well, she hasn't, she thinks it's unlucky."

"Can I get hold of this girl?" asked Faraday. "Don't ask me why I want to see her."

"All right, but it beats me. I expect Gallin knows her address."

"Oh, we won't bother him. Where did she used to take Arthur?"

"To a night club with a typical name, 'The Pink Nightie.'"

"They'll probably know her address there. Where is the place?"

"We'll look it up in the telephone book." He beckoned to a waiter who returned with the book in a moment.

"Yes, here it is," said Bob, "'The Pink Nightie Social

Club, 18 Hallow Court,' that's just off Shaftesbury Avenue, I think."

"What's the girl's name?"

"Peggy something."

"I imagine that's a fairly common name in such circles," laughed Faraday.

"I suppose so. But she and Arthur were a well-known couple—they'll know who we mean."

"Do you think she fleeced him?"

"As a matter of fact I don't. I believe she was quite fond of him, and protected him from the toughs, male, and especially female. But really, Anthony, I know very little about the whole business. You must judge for yourself when you meet her. Though why the deuce you want to meet her. . . ."

"Be satisfied that it may have to do with Lucy, I just want to satisfy myself about something. What time do these places get going?"

"I believe they're open for dinner, but begin to get really full about ten."

"It's that now, let's get along."

When they reached the "Pink Nightie" their entry was strongly challenged by Snoot.

"If you ain't members you can't come in—'op it!"

"No impertinence from you, my man," said Bob sternly, though he was much amused at the apparition. "Fetch the manager."

Presently Oily approached. "Sorry, gents, can't be done," he said regretfully, for he detected affluence.

"Look here, sir," said Bob forcibly, "we have not come to visit your club. A lady used to come here with Mr. Arthur Bault and this gentleman wishes to speak to her. It's a matter of great importance."

"Well, that's different," said Oily. "I'll sign you in. I suppose you mean Peggy Camden?"

"Yes," Bob replied as they entered the premises.

"Then you're in luck for she's ordered a table and will

be here any time now. Come to the ballroom. Your names?"

"Dr. Faraday and Mr. Carshall."

There was something a bit formidable about these gents, thought Oily—might be high-class dicks, but he didn't think so. He showed them to a table and took their order. The room was fairly full and the band was at work.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced Freddie, "our next number will be entitled 'Mountaineers Have Shaggy Locks.'"

"Well, don't mess 'em about!" ordered a voice.

"The Girl with the Dreamy Eyes," began bleating forth.

The place mildly entertained Faraday. He couldn't imagine himself spending many hours in it—he disliked paying thirty-five shillings for a bottle of the most lamentable champagne for one thing. He couldn't imagine any one tolerating such "dumps" as he believed they were called, if that one were stone-cold sober. But if one were in the early stages of intoxication and bored, disillusioned or at odds with the world, one might find them an anodyne. Probably those who ran such places were mildly amusing scoundrels. But how could any one endure that band, night after night! Anyway, the atmosphere of this particular one seemed almost boringly respectable; very different from their prototypes on the Continent and in the Americas, North and South. He said so much to Bob.

"This isn't altogether typical," the latter replied. "There are plenty of tough joints even in London, the proprietors of which make say four or five hundred profit; and then go quite placidly to quod for some months before coming out and repeating the process. But I bet you that they have a rough house here fairly often, and that manager looks every inch a crook to me."

Presently the person so accurately described appeared with Peggy, whom he led up to their table.

"This is Miss Camden," he said with what he thought

was a pleasant smile. "These gentlemen would like a word with you, Peggy."

Peggy gave the gentlemen a swift "once-over." She looked slightly apprehensive; strange men sometimes meant trouble. Bob and Faraday introduced themselves and she sat down with them; Faraday regarded her with interest. In spite of his mistrust of feminine facial evidence, he took an immediate liking to her.

"Miss Camden," he said, "please don't be worried; it's just that I want to ask you a few questions about Arthur Bault." He flicked his fingers to the waiter and ordered another bottle of the dubious drench. This remark did not seem to have diminished Peggy's apprehension.

"Well, shoot," she said pugnaciously.

"I understand you were asked by Mr. Gallin to put something in Mr. Bault's drink."

"I only did it because I was told it would help him out."

"I'm quite certain of that, and did it help him?"

"I'm not the doctor. I don't know whether it did him any good. All I know is it made him so sleepy it made him drink less. As soon as he'd had it he began blinking and very soon passed out. If that was what it was for, it worked."

"And you have no idea what was in it?"

"Of course not. Gallin used to give it to me and I gave it to him, that's all I know about it. But look here, I've got some of it at home. You'd better come and have a decco at it."

Faraday showed his satisfaction and surprise.

"How did that happen?"

"Well, one day the cork came out of one of the little bottles and a lot got spilled. Of course I had to get another ration, but I had a hunch right then and there on the spur of the moment, and I decided to keep what was left. If there's going to be trouble I'm darn glad I did."

"Oh, don't talk about trouble."

"Then why this Third Degree?"

"Never mind for the moment. Whatever it is it won't involve you in anything unpleasant."

At that moment George appeared with the bottle and served them.

"Tell me about places such as this," said Faraday, "I know nothing about them."

"Then you know everything," said Peggy dryly, "for there's nothing to know."

"What is the attraction? I doubt if it's the music."

"This band's lousy, but a good band will fill a club—for a time anyway."

"Is it—well, the ladies?"

"If the man's tight enough to be a mug enough. Now look here, it's simply this. A certain number of people are so bored they are more or less 'crackers,' half-witted—and they're all messed up and nowhere to go. There are some quite sane people, of course, who just come in for a drink and a dance and then beat it. Now take me. There used to be a line, 'I'm 'ere, because I'm 'ere, because I'm 'ere, because I'm 'ere'—that's me and lots of others. I'll tell you the truth, I've got something on my mind. I'm fond of someone and I can't tell you more." She drained her glass. "He has to be out a lot at night and often goes away. I can't sit in the flat, so I come here, and when I've had a few drinks I'm not so worried."

"It's perfectly clear," said Bob, "I've felt the same myself." Peggy regarded him sardonically. "You bet your life it's the same," she thought.

Faraday realised he was in the presence of a curious and attractive character. She had probably, he thought, descended the scale socially and ascended it spiritually, in the sense that she was now mistress of herself. He compared her with Mrs. Chalneys in his mind. They shared the same disillusionment but—and oh, what a difference it made!—Mrs. Chalneys had a green-light private income, and this one had but few and precarious claims on the National Dividend. He could imagine it being extremely easy to fall in love with her if one had forgotten the very

meaning of the word "snobbery,"—but it was time to be off.

Much to Oily's satisfaction they paid their exorbitant bill without demur, and Bob gave Snoot a ten-shilling note, which caused that gentleman to wish him the very best luck for the future which, so Snoot maintained, he would certainly enjoy if he backed Tarantula the next day for the three-thirty race at Northolt.

They took a taxi to Rupert Street, stopping on the way at a chemist, where Faraday bought a small medicine bottle.

Mr. Harter was reading a paper almost entirely devoted to dog-racing, in the sitting-room. There was surprise and something more in his expression as he rose to greet the intruders. His gaze was all for Faraday.

"Don't be alarmed," said the latter laughing. "My visit has nothing to do with our brief encounter in the Strand."

"What's that?" said Peggy sharply.

"Oh, never mind," said Mr. Harter rather irritably.

"I just made a mug of myself for the 'umteenth time."

"Do you mean to say," asked Peggy, "you tried it on this gentleman? Why, you great mutt, you're losing your mind!"

"Every one is liable to drop his wallet," said Faraday. "Let's forget it. This is Mr. Carshall—my name is Faraday."

At that moment something lithe and dappled on the rug by the fireplace sat up and took a little notice. It stretched itself, blinked several times, yawned voluptuously and started to wash its paws. It had two licks, called it a day, and began massaging its backbone against Faraday's right shin.

"That used to be Arthur's puss, Sambo," said Peggy, and a certain expression on that tough and buoyant little face almost eliminated from Faraday's mind any doubt he might once have felt concerning Miss Peggy Camden.

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen. My name is 'Harter' for the time being and for the purposes of this story," said that person with slightly nervous irony.

"Our coming," said Faraday, "concerns the death of Arthur Bault; it may be entirely a fool's errand. In any case, as I have told Miss Camden, she has not the slightest reason to feel alarm or reproach."

Mr. Harter appeared unconvinced.

"I know Peggy better than you do—she wouldn't have given him any pass-out powders. But she'd no business doping any one—lousy, always said so. Anyway, what's the business—something hot?"

"Mr. Harter," said Faraday, "your wife acted with great kindness. Now, Bob, if I say that sort of thing, I mean it, don't I?"

"I should certainly say so, Anthony."

Mr. Harter's face cleared. "Excuse me," he said, "but our unrivalled police have a habit of extorting confessions by a parade of that kindness; but they happen to be unmitigated swine. I can see you're not. Go ahead."

"Then," said Faraday, "you can trust me, and I want you to show that trust by asking no questions at this moment. But take it from me no possible harm of any sort can come to either of you."

"O.K.," said Mr. Harter.

"Well, Miss Camden tells me she has kept some of the medicine she used to administer to young Bault. She was very wise to do so."

"I'll go and get it," said Peggy. She left the room, and came back in a moment with the little phial. Faraday poured half its contents into his little medicine bottle, and returned the phial to Peggy.

"Take care of this," he said. "It may be of some importance, and it may be of none at all."

"And you swear that if anything's phoney, you won't jerk me into it?"

"Look here, you wouldn't mind answering a couple of questions or so in a court if I told you it was the right thing to do; and if not the slightest reflection was made on your conduct?"

"Let me say 'Look here,'" answered Peggy. "I'll do

anything you told me, guy, because I don't believe you could tell a lie if you knew how. Also I can see you don't care for women, and therefore you treat them decently."

Faraday burst out laughing. "Well, that's an odd compliment," he said. "What does Mr. Harter think of it?"

"I've got something else to think about," said that gentleman. "You know, Mr. Faraday—dropping wallets."

Peggy got up and flung her arms around his neck.

"Darling, you can't help it, and you do it *marvellously*. Anyhow I love you, so hell to the cock-eyed world!"

"A pleasant little domestic scene," said Bob, as he and Faraday reached the outer air. "Is he a confidence trickster?"

"Certainly," replied Faraday.

"And he tried it on you?"

"This afternoon."

"He can't be a very astute member of his craft."

"Oh, I don't know. I probably have a rather professorial look about me and, next to a certain type of American and Dominion business man, dons and parsons are the favourite mark for all brands of highbrow crooks."

"I like that girl," said Bob. "A robust spirit and what an eye to match!"

"I imagine you need one if you're the wife of a professional dropper of wallets. For her sake I hope he beats all his raps, as the Americans say. Good-night—I'll meet you at Lucy's at about ten."

Back in his flat Faraday spent some time in his laboratory, analysing the contents of the little medicine bottle.

"Well, and what the Hades d'you make of that?" said Harter after they were alone. "Who are those guys, anyway?"

"Carshall's engaged to Lucy Bault."

"And the other one?"

"Dunno. Her doctor, I suppose."

"But what's the idea? What do they want with that

ruddy bottle? What about that answering questions in court stuff?" Harter's tone was nervously irritable.

"Just trouble," said Peggy tersely.

"What sort of trouble?"

"I can't make it."

"Hell to it!" exclaimed Harter. "I always said that doping stunt was dynamite. D'you suppose it's that rat, Wilkins?"

"I don't. For the only thing he'd got on me was the fact that I used the stuff. That doc. said I wasn't in any jam about that."

Harter paced up and down the room, his head almost obscured by cigarette smoke.

"I'll tell you what I think's the racket; I believe that dope was crooked. Otherwise why did he want to take some of it away? I believe that soak was bumped off."

"How could they have found that out?"

"What sort of bloke's that Gallin?"

"Ordinary kind of business boss. Why?"

"I was just thinking he gave it to you."

"And the doc. gave it to him."

"How d'you know?"

"How do I know?" replied Peggy uncertainly.

"Yes."

"Well, I don't."

"That's ruddy well it; you don't. I'm telling you I've got a feeling there's plenty trouble. And you've got to keep out of it."

"I said I'd say my piece in the box."

"And I say you'll be an ace-mutt if you do. I can imagine those 'one or two questions' he talked about. One or two hundred, more likely, and every one a rasper. They'd want to know how you make your living, and whether you pinched your sisters' dough, and what the difference was between a dance-hostess and a tart, and what you did in your spare time. And they'd want to know about me, and what sort of a bright citizen I was, and whether I'd ever had a date with a couple of warders, and just stacks of

little things like that. We'd get some fine publicity between us, and *we don't want it.*"

"You've said it!" exclaimed Peggy, unpleasantly impressed by this recital. "But that doc. said there'd be none of that stuff, no reflections on my character, as he prettily put it."

"Then he's either a liar or a dummy. If it's real trouble, you'll be sweating like a stoker when you leave the stand!"

"They won't make me sweat!" replied Peggy scornfully.

"Oh, won't they! And so will the press hounds—they'll be scrapping on the doorstep. And they'll be after me and I'll be sweated too. Now come on. I believe I'll shake-down my daddy within a week. Then lets beat it for the sticks and the long grass; France, God's Own or some place."

"And let that doc. down?"

"Hell, yes! Which would you rather—let him down, or me?"

"You know the answer to that one!"

"It's one or the other. The law's never done us any good; why should we hand it to them? To put it in plain, blunt English, we're a couple of crooks, and we can't afford luxuries. Give me a drink."

Peggy poured out a couple.

"If you go in that box," continued Harter vehemently, "we're sunk and I know it. Besides, by the time you'd been called a liar, a crook and a poll a few times, your evidence wouldn't be worth a dead bug's guts. If that doc. thinks otherwise, his nut must be full of lemon-peel and apple-sauce."

"But they'll send me a summons—a what's-name," objected Peggy.

"What if they do? Where'll they send it? We shall have skipped from here and forgotten to leave our address with the porter."

"I believe you're right," said Peggy. "I'm not keen on a grilling, and I can't let you be lugged in."

"You swear that's settled?"

"Sure!"

"Then let's go to bed!"

"What about daddy?"

"He went to roost pickled after dinner. But I shall be at his bed-side bright and early, with his bromo-seltzer, his belly-powder and his treble-strength bomb-you-up. After that we'll have breakfast off a flock of White Horses and a few buckets of iced-water."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE next morning Faraday rang up Doctor Reynolds and made an appointment for three o'clock that afternoon. He spent two hours of that morning giving Lucy a thorough examination, the result of which were highly satisfactory.

Reynolds, he knew by repute, was a peppery old person, and the interview, he realised, would be a delicate one. He realised it all the more when he was shown into the old man's consulting-room; for he found himself confronting a hirsute and grizzled fellow with a searching and impatient eye.

"I've come," said Faraday ingratiatingly, "on a confidential mission—one you may consider a breach of etiquette—but I think I can convince you that I am acting rightly."

Doctor Reynolds uttered some vague, non-committal sounds.

"It concerns," Faraday continued, "the death of Arthur Bault."

The other looked at him sharply and with some suspicion.

"Well?" he said.

"I understand you gave Mr. Gallin a prescription which he was to have made up."

"Not at all. I gave him the stuff ready made up. They asked me to do something—though I regarded it as a

hopeless case. It was just a sedative and with a certain added specific. I'll show it you."

He pulled out a ledger from a shelf, opened it, and handed it to Faraday.

"Yes," said the latter with a grim smile. "I see it contains no dial."

The old man glared at him. "Dial!" he exclaimed loudly. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Simply this. By an accident the girl concerned in the administration of the stuff to Bault kept some of it. I have analysed it, and it was a strong solution of dial."

Doctor Reynolds showed his bewilderment.

"But damn it," he exclaimed, "what's the meaning of this? Dial!"

"I take it that drug would have hastened his end?"

"Sheer poison to him!"

"Then *that's* the meaning of it."

A look of growing comprehension came over the other's face.

"I see," he said slowly. "But I can't get her motive. Surely it was to her interest to keep him alive?"

"Most certainly. And therefore—apart from other reasons—I'm convinced *she* knew nothing about this substitution."

Doctor Reynolds regarded him for a long ten seconds.

"Now is that *possible*?" he said.

"You can see so for yourself."

"But what was *his* motive?"

"Bault's money went to his sister. He's her next of kin, and she's made no will."

The old man tugged at his tangled eyebrows—a characteristic gesture.

"And she's been pretty bad, too, I understand," he said.

"I just managed to save her life. Now, Reynolds, this is still to a great extent mere suspicion."

"What about that dial?"

"Well, the police would naturally suspect the girl. In

the case of Miss Bault others might have been responsible. Again, he is very rich, *apparently*—I stress that word—in no need of money. On the evidence I've collected it would be a terribly hard fight to get a conviction."

"How was Miss Bault attacked?"

Faraday told him.

"Damned ingenious!" exclaimed the old man. "Never heard of it before!"

"There have been a few cases, but none to my knowledge criminal."

"He's an innovator!"

"Yet," said Faraday, "it's just conceivable he's innocent. The girl struck me as perfectly straight, but she may be a clever little actress. Again, Lucy had enemies in the office who had opportunity. I am going to put him to the test once more, completely to satisfy myself."

"And if you're satisfied?"

"I shall see that he's punished."

"But I thought you doubted the force of your evidence?" said the old man, puzzled.

"In any case I shall see that he's punished."

Doctor Reynolds looked sharply at Faraday.

"Perhaps," he said, "it is better I should curb my curiosity."

"I don't mean to be mysterious," Faraday rejoined.

"It's simply this. If I convince myself absolutely that he's guilty, I shall see that his punishment is commensurate with his crime—I am still quite vague as to how this will be done. He even might confess—or be made to. In any case I will let you know all that transpires."

"Please do," said the old man, "for he's a most infernal rogue."

Their parting was more cordial than their greeting.

On his next visit to her, Faraday found Lucy in a highly-nervous state—an inevitable post-symptom.

"Look here, my dear," he said quietly, "you can fix your wedding day any time after a month from now."

"But are you absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely."

"But what's been the matter with me?"

"You will know before long."

"Why not now?"

"I can imagine, my dear, how maddening it must be for you to be in this state of uncertainty; to have all this mystery and secrecy surrounding you. It must make you suspicious and anxious. But I swear to you after a week or two—your nerves will be jumpy for a while—you will be a perfectly healthy girl again. This secrecy has nothing to do with your state of health. You will know the cause of it before long. In the meantime you must trust me."

"Of course I do, but I'm utterly bewildered."

"Is Bob coming in?"

"In about an hour."

"You can tell him what I say about changing your horrid name," said Faraday smiling, as he took his leave.

He dined at his flat that night and, after two hours with the "Midget," put down his pen, poured out a drink and lay back in his huge arm-chair. A sense of extreme satisfaction came over him; that sense which only comes a very few times in any one's life-time, and to many never. It came from the realisation that one has done another some great service without gain to oneself; lightened, if only for a little while, the heavy load of life. In saving Lucy for Bob he felt he had gone a little way towards justifying his existence. But there was an ordeal still to face.

At eleven the next morning he took a taxi to Glovfit's and asked if Mr. Gallin could see him for a few moments. The latter showed his anxiety as he greeted him.

"How's my poor Lucy? When I rang up last night they told me she was a little better; I do hope it's true."

"I'm thankful to say it is," replied Faraday, watching the other closely without appearing to do so—a trick diagnosticians of all professions acquire. "So much so that I believe she will be 'Mrs. Carshall' before many weeks have passed."

Gallin took a cigarette from his case and lit it. Faraday noticed the flame fluttered a little as he did so.

"Quite out of danger?" asked Gallin.

"I think I can say so."

"That's splendid. I do hope she won't have any more of these attacks."

"She won't," said Faraday a shade abruptly.

"That's even better news. But are you quite certain?"

Faraday regarded him intently for a moment. "Perfectly," he replied, "for I have discovered their cause."

Gallin leaned back in his chair and the expression on his face oddly changed. It became set and rigid, and he gazed back at Faraday with an unblinkable stare. It reminded Faraday of that indescribable look epileptics often wear just before the breaking-point. It told him all he wanted to know. He could see the effort it cost Gallin to lean forward again with the sweat beginning to ooze down from below his hair. That look was premature, however, and Faraday appeared not to have noticed it.

"It all dates back," he said, "to that trip she took to Egypt."

Gallin had great self-control, but this put it to too harsh a test. His relief—perhaps it was more incredulity than relief—was too violent; he could not conceal it.

He crushed out his cigarette, fumbled with some papers on his desk and oscillated his rump in his chair.

Faraday went on imperturbably, "She contracted there a disease called meta-dysentery, which I don't suppose you have heard of."

"No," replied Gallin, rather too emphatically.

"Suffice it to say that this particular bacillus was discovered some years ago by a famous Italian physician; it has long plagued the Egyptians. It is usually fairly mild and chronic; in Lucy's case it was violent and acute."

"And it's curable?" asked Gallin, almost himself again.

"Practically always, by a combination of diet and

inoculation. I blame myself for not having detected it earlier, but I did not know about this Egyptian trip, and Lucy must have picked up an unusually virulent bug."

There was a short silence, broken at length by Gallin.

"I believe," he said, "that Lucy made that trip nearly two years ago. Isn't it curious this bug should have got to work, as it were, only this summer?"

(Rather cleverly daring of him! thought Faraday.)

"It's the nature of the beast," he replied. "It often lies dormant. This abnormally hot summer woke it up. I have found that each of Lucy's attacks coincided with a heat-wave."

"That's very interesting," said Gallin.

"Yes, it is. But what is much more interesting to all of us is the fact that she will have no more trouble in the future."

"Of course that's the great thing," agreed Gallin.

"And now I won't take up any more of your time," said Faraday.

He noticed as he shook Gallin's hand that it resembled a damp and sticky sponge.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THAT evening after dinner Faraday sat down at his desk and wrote far into the night.

The next morning he left a small package at Scotland Yard.

After visiting Lucy and finding her progress maintained, he knew a sensation of swiftly increasing malaise. He realised what that meant—a dose of fever. He went straight to bed, with a steadily rising temperature—much to the disguised satisfaction of Mr. and Mrs. Bounser; who rejoiced in the fact that such revival-meetings of bacilli put him for the time being completely at their devoted mercies.

Bounser made frequent visits to the sick-room, and when given any encouragement discoursed with vivacity on the topics of the hour. Particularly was he concerned with the position occupied by his native shire—Northampton—in the County Championship competition. Faraday gathered that it was bringing up the abject rear. Bounser attributed this humiliation entirely to what he considered the inequitable system of scoring points. He had devised a method of his own which he considered a vast improvement; none the less for the fact that, if it had been in operation, it would have promoted Northants above Somerset and Worcester. Faraday, after vainly attempting to grapple with its complications, resigned himself to the conclusion that its exposition by Bounser was by far the finest antidote to insomnia ever applied.

Mrs. Bounser also came in for a daily chat, and her favourite topics were the possibility of a change in the temperature, the lives and loves of members of the House of Windsor and the versatile depravities of the occupants of the other flats. Her information as to these was of such a comprehensive and stop-press character that Faraday, in his febrile state, had a vision of a vast grape-vine with a mighty branch in each of a myriad bazaars.

However, on the third morning he was up and dressed and almost himself again when he was rung up on the telephone. It was that high official at Scotland Yard asking if he could come along and see him before lunch. Twenty minutes later Faraday was being shown into his room.

"Hallo, Tony," said the official. "You're not looking too fit."

"Had a touch of fever, Ned."

"Well," said the latter, "I'm afraid I haven't very good news for you."

"I'm not altogether surprised," said Faraday.

"Your very able and persuasive paper has been closely studied, and, personally, it has convinced me of the fellow's guilt; that is to say, I feel it instinctively, but if I were

to decide the case purely as a more or less competent judge of evidence, I should acquit him every time."

"Go ahead and tell me why."

"Firstly, we have made inquiries about him and, as far as can be ascertained, he is a most worthy citizen. His business repute is of the highest. He has no vices. He doesn't drink, is apparently almost sexless—in fact is merely a little more than a rather dreary commercial machine, and a very prosperous one to boot. I grant you he may have money troubles, but there is no sign of them, and his tastes are almost absurdly simple. Where, to a jury, would be the motive of such a model person for such a dastardly crime? And who would be the chief and crucial witness against him?—The gold-digging mistress of a confidence-trickster!"

"Has he ever been convicted as such?"

"No, but he's stood his trial; and this girl, Peggy, would be asked some very awkward questions as to his and her method of earning their livings. You'll agree that, without her evidence, the whole case practically collapses?"

"Is that so? Surely she is concerned with only half of it?"

"No. If Gallin was not attempting to kill the boy, there was no point in trying to kill the girl. The boy might have lived for years."

"I see that."

"And a clever counsel would shatter the value of Peggy's testimony by exposing her character. And the judge would be entirely on his side. For where the Law is concerned, no doubt our judges are impeccable, but where it is a question of morals many of them are prejudiced and anachronistic humbugs. By morals, I mean of course, like every other Briton, sex and nothing else. Can't you imagine that counsel comparing his upright, stainless, prosperous client with an ex-dance-hostess—of whom, as a matter of fact, ninety per cent are harlots or sneak-thieves—the mistress of a more than dubious character?"

"You haven't seen the girl," objected Faraday. "I don't believe she'd make a bad impression in the box."

"If she was confident, she'd be considered brazen. If she was nervous, they'd call it justified funk.—But to continue. Certainly, counsel would argue, young Bault might have been indirectly killed by dial—though even that was by no means certain for, while there was dial in the bottle found at her flat, none of its contents had been administered to the dead man."

"There would surely be very strong presumption that the contents of that bottle were typical of what had been administered?"

"Admitting that, who was most likely to have been guilty—the prosperous and reputable citizen, or the hardened little adventuress?"

"For no motive whatsoever!"

"Is that so? The effect of dial is to stupefy."

"It is a dangerously potent soporific."

"Precisely. And stupefied young men of means are easy game for gold-diggers. What more plausible than that she should have gone through his pockets and played tricks with his cheque book when he was only partially in possession of his senses? No doubt, counsel would argue, Gallin was indiscreet in employing her, but the boy was in love with her, and it was agreed the experiment should be tried."

Faraday saw the force of this. "But why," he exclaimed, "if that were the case, did she not destroy the only evidence against her? Why didn't she put the contents of that bottle down the sink? Why did she actually go out of her way to tell me she had it still in her possession?"

"Because she was a subtle little schemer who argued that if ever there was any trouble, she could say: 'That is what Gallin gave me. Would I have kept it if I'd been guilty?'"

Faraday shrugged his shoulders. "That is subtlety indeed," he said, "and surely the acme of improbability."

"You say that because you have formed a highly

favourable opinion of the girl. Gallin's counsel would take very good care that the members of the jury didn't."

"Go on," said Faraday resignedly.

"Counsel would certainly agree that she never meant to kill him, that it was to her interest to keep him alive. But she didn't know the condition of his heart, and gave him too strong a dose. 'If dial was administered to Bault,' he would thunder forth, 'it was the work either of a highly-respected and wealthy man, actually the very uncle of the victim to whom he had always shown every kindness and affection, whom only a malignant mind could conceive of having any motive, or else it was the handiwork of an abandoned little denizen of the underworld—one with only too palpable a motive, one who had doubtless employed such means many times before and was accustomed to consort immorally with notorious characters. That was the issue before them and they could take their choice.' And, mind you, Tony, whatever your opinion of the girl, there must be incidents in her past which the defence could rake up to their advantage.—Well, how does it sound to you?"

"Extremely plausible and yet absolutely unconvincing," answered Faraday irritably. "For one thing, dial is a drug that would never be used by ordinary dopers."

"You couldn't convince a jury of that. The underworld has its own chemists who know all about dial, and its uses, and would readily impart that knowledge to their clients."

"Again, she was already being well paid."

"Why not fleece him as well?"

Faraday shrugged his shoulders again.

"I certainly see," he said, "I've been exceedingly obtuse. I had it in my mind that it was entirely to her interest to keep him alive and, therefore, not to dope him. I still think it was, for I'm convinced she never went through his pockets or tampered with his cheque book. But I can quite see how it could be twisted against her. Also I realise that there is no direct evidence that dial was ever administered."

"And remember the doctor gave a death-certificate without question or demur."

"I know."

"As I have said, I don't believe a word of all this. I absolutely trust your opinion of the girl and believe in Gallin's guilt. But I also believe that if the case ever came to trial—which is highly improbable—the judge would stop it."

"We have only been dealing with half the case," said Faraday, "the weaker half. Can you demolish the other half as easily?"

"I'll make the attempt. Firstly, counsel would submit it was quite possible that the poisoning of Miss Bault had been entirely accidental. You say this is the first time this method has been employed criminally?"

"So far as my knowledge goes."

"That there have been other cases, but purely accidental?"

"I must give the same answer."

"Then why shouldn't this instance have been accidental also?"

"Three consecutive attacks? Some coincidence!"

"Why shouldn't these tins have all come from the same polluted batch?"

"And only Miss Bault be affected?"

"She might have been the only member of the staff to use that particular brand."

"And the only person in England to do so?"

"Others may have been poisoned and their illness labelled 'gastritis'—as hers was."

"The manufacturers would have something to say to that!"

"Undoubtedly. But they would have precedent against them. Arsenic has been found in toilet-powder before; why not again?"

"That tin was half-empty. Why wasn't Miss Bault attacked when she used it before?"

"You must see that we are within the realm of conjec-

ture. It would be very hard to trace the precise history of that tin. I may say, my dear Tony, that you might not come out with untarnished repute. I can well imagine learned counsel describing you as a busybody, a very amateur Thorndyke, an absurdly suspicious old gentleman, and one whom the jury would do well to take with many grains of humour. Also you would have to confess that you had used specimens from that tin."

"Possibly three teaspoonfuls."

"Learned counsel would flourish a *tablespoon* in the jury's face. However, let us suppose the learned counsel agreed that the arsenic in that tin had been placed there with criminal intent. You would be forced to substantiate—and so would Miss Bault—the fact that at least two attempts had been made on her life by members of the staff. The ice might be thin there, but the defence would consider it would bear. No names would be mentioned, but the general impression left that she was a generally detested person; so much so that she had roused homicidal impulses in the majority of those who worked with her."

"That grossly exaggerated submission could very easily be rebutted. The vast majority of the staff at Glovfit's liked her."

"If you put some of them in the box, their evidence would be vague and nebulous compared with the stark fact that those attempts had been made. Furthermore, it could presumably be shown that certain members of the staff had access to a factory where chemicals were freely used."

"Especially arsenic!" observed Faraday sarcastically.

"Surely arsenic is used commercially?"

"In the manufacture of corsets!"

"My dear Tony, you are clearly rather ignorant of the gentle art of pleading which, in certain criminal cases, relies far more on insinuation and veiled suggestion than on categorical statement and assertion. You're a scientist by training, a precisian. Pleading is an art, the art of just sufficiently befuddling the minds of seven men and women out of twelve."

"Gallin would have to make a categorical answer to the plain question: Did he use arsenic in his factory? Which-ever answer he gave would be awkward for him."

"He'd be provided by his counsel with a neat, non-committal answer."

"So far," said Faraday, "this trial seems rather one-sided. Would there not be also highly competent counsel for the prosecution and some ingeniously insinuating cross-examination?"

"If it ever came to trial, yes. But I am suggesting they would have precious little to go on. Actually, I don't believe the case would ever get past the Grand Jury."

"Yet you believe him guilty?"

"Most certainly. I am merely showing up the weakness of the case against him. We have very many such problems every year—quite a few in which murder is involved. At this moment I can recall five, in which the evidence was far stronger than in this case. Yet we advised against prosecution. Remember this: we hate and fear failures. To get up a case such as this is a costly and laborious business. To use a parliamentary metaphor, the money will not be voted for it, the time of the House not occupied with a prosecution unless it is decided that the odds on a conviction are at least three to one."

"A reassuring reflection for the potential criminal!"

"Oh, quite. The majority of really clever crooks are never brought to trial. We don't advertise the fact, but it's true. Company frauds, arson and murder, too, are extraordinarily difficult to bring home to their perpetrators if they plan adroitly and keep their heads. I suppose there's no chance of getting further evidence against him?"

"I'm afraid I can't see any. I may be a fool, but I still consider the evidence against him very strong. He has two surviving relatives from whom, if they both die, he inherits about a hundred thousand pounds. One dies, the other just escapes. In both instances he had perfect opportunity. He is an expert chemist and these are chemical crimes. Motive,

opportunity and expert knowledge—a suggestive complex ! ”

The other shook his head. “ It’s not good enough, my dear Tony, for other probable suspects had those capacities also. There is an instrument used in America called the ‘ Lie-Detector ’ which is claimed to be infallible. By its means the reactions of a suspected person to the questions put to him are recorded graphically. I believe it to be scientifically sound, and it has already helped in securing convictions and acquittals indirectly in difficult cases. It would be instructive to submit Mr. Gallin to its inquisition. Properly employed, it is an invaluable and perfectly legitimate form of Third Degree—a much maligned institution. But unfortunately the rights of criminals are regarded very sacredly over here. But you can’t have it both ways. Is it better that one innocent person should be convicted and nine-hundred and ninety-nine guilty ones convicted also, or is it better that every innocent person should be acquitted and a large percentage of crooks get away with it also ? A nice problem in social ethics or pragmatics—if there is such a word.”

“ I’ll leave its solution to you,” replied Faraday. “ The fact is that you cannot recommend the proper authority to take up the case.”

“ I fear that is so.”

“ Then that’s an end of it.”

“ Unless,” laughed the other, “ you can persuade him to confess.”

Faraday was silent for a while. Then he said, “ What is the value and standing of an extorted confession ? I mean if it perfectly fits and explains the facts ? ”

The other regarded him with a quizzical smile. “ As a guardian of the sacred rights to which I have just referred, I don’t think that’s a proper question to put to me.”

“ It is a purely academic one.”

“ In that case I reply that it all depends on the degree and kind of intimidation employed, and the capacity of the extortionist to lie convincingly in court.”

"Quite so," said Faraday. "Well, there's one thing I'm glad about. I as good as told that girl Peggy that if she went into the box her character would not be assailed. Apparently that was not one of my more inspired remarks; and therefore she has been spared a considerable ordeal."

The other burst out laughing. "I should think not, indeed! Her character—in other words, her reliability as a witness—would have been the one target they'd have trained their guns on. But I doubt if she'd ever have turned up to be bombarded—and I shouldn't have blamed her, for only fools go willingly into that small cubby-hole of torture and self-revelation, unless they've something to gain or nothing to lose. Now, look here, Tony. I'm extremely sorry to have turned this thing down, but I had no other alternative."

"I quite see that now. Before you so unanswerably blasted the whole foundation from beneath my crazily-constructed edifice of proof, I was blinded by that instinctive certainty of his guilt which you confess you share. So be it; there it is."

The high official regarded him sharply, but with a smile.

"Somehow or other," said he, "I don't feel that you have resigned yourself to the apparently inevitable quite so finally as your words suggest. If I'm right, the very best of luck. And if all goes well, let me know. Record it in the form of a parable and I shall understand. I should like to feel that the case could be written off as closed to our mutual satisfaction."

"In any case I'm very grateful to you for all the trouble you've taken," said Faraday. "Let us meet again soon. Good-bye for the present."

Back in his flat, Faraday sat down to think. After reviewing the conversation in which he'd played so humble a part he accepted without further protest the fact that Ned's pungent, if sketchy analysis of the evidence was final. He realised that any clever counsel could riddle it. In cold fact, the case would never be tried. There was no chance of obtaining further proof.

Was that to be the end? Was the logical conclusion to be the final one? His mind sharply revolted against such a decision. To punish such criminals as Gallin was doubtless in theory crude and barbaric; an asylum was the place for them. But they certainly should be segregated somewhere. A Gallin at large was a peril to society. The end—his segregation—would justify the means by which it was accomplished, and all that sort of plausible rhetoric.

But he was faced with a dilemma. Had not Gallin a perfect right to enjoy the privilege, always supposedly accorded by British criminal practice, of being treated as innocent till proved guilty? Were not the experts convinced he could never so be proved? *He* knew Gallin was guilty, but who was he to set himself up as an arbiter against that expert opinion? Yet he knew it to be indisputable that he was in a far better position than any expert to decide. He had been vouchsafed evidence which, though it could not be used in court, was overpoweringly convincing.

He remained staring in upon himself for a full hour. He was still weak from his illness and found concentrating an effort. At length, however, he made up his mind, and what must be done must be done quickly.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BOB and Faraday dined together at the latter's flat.

"I promised to tell you, Bob," said Faraday, "the cause of Lucy's illness, so soon as I was sure of it. I can now do so; she was poisoned by Gallin."

Bob exhibited all the usual signs of amazement and incredulity.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—and he also murdered her brother—for it amounts to that. It was quite simple; the stuff he gave to the girl to administer was not the stuff he got from Reynolds. The inevitable result was heart-failure."

" Good God ! " said Bob, " are you absolutely certain ? "

" Oh, yes, there's no doubt about it."

" But how did he poison Lucy ? "

Faraday told him.

" I simply can't believe it. I always liked the fellow—at least I think so," he added lamely.

" I don't suppose you had any formed opinion of him, for he is a curious fellow."

" Curious ! I should think he is—poisoning his nephew and niece. I simply can't believe it."

" That's been said tens of thousands of times by the relatives and friends of criminals. A quarter of their morning-paper is given up to crime, but they cannot conceive it tainting *their* milieu."

" But the motive ? "

" Their money ! "

" But he's stiff with it ! "

" Are you sure ? Have you any more reason to be certain of that than you were of his character ? "

Bob hesitated. " No," he confessed. " I suppose I simply took both for granted. I'm flabbergasted. Think of that vile old spider spinning his diabolical web. And yet he doesn't look like a murderer."

" No," agreed Faraday, " and had things been ever so little different, I dare say he might have lived out his allotted span and never known the slightest temptation to be one. I don't believe he's naturally avaricious either—and yet he's planned two murders for money. Some mystery there which we'll try to solve. We will try a little experiment. I want you to suggest to him that I might like to have a financial interest in his business—become his partner, as it were. Imply that I am tired of roaming, and would like to settle down in London with some business interest. You know the sort of thing."

" I know."

" Watch him closely, and see how he takes it."

" Shall I suggest any possible sum ? "

" You can say that I am a very rich man, and that if

I came in I should do so on a biggish scale. If he bites, say that I should like to see him here about it at once. Impress on him that you are getting married almost immediately. Do that to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Sure. About Lucy. We thought of keeping to the second week in September for our wedding. Do you think that will be all right?"

"Almost certainly. I'm going to make a little trip to Germany during the next few weeks, but I shall be back for the great day. After that I shall be off to Russia."

"Why not come with us? We thought of a long cruise somewhere."

"No," replied Faraday firmly. "My days for deck-quoits, sun-bathing on boat-decks, fancy-dress and other forms of forced and laborious *bonhomie* are over. Moreover, I can imagine that the company of honeymoon couples is peculiarly noxious and enervating."

"Thanks very much. At the same time, I consider as her medical attendant it is your duty to come."

"I hope to be present when she next needs one, and a child of wrath is born."

"In the event of its being male," said Bob, "it will be christened 'Anthony Faraday Carshall.'"

"That may preserve it to some extent."

"Why are you going to Russia?" asked Bob. "Everybody who thinks himself or herself somebody seems to have been there for the purpose, apparently, of reinforcing their own prejudices. A week in Moscow and an interview with Stalin—in which they do nine-tenths of the talking—and they come back knowing all about it. In fact they needn't have gone, for they knew it all beforehand. I am surprised that you propose to bring up the rear of that garrulous and self-satisfied mob."

"I'm going," replied Faraday, "partly because it is one of the few lands I have not visited, and I want to see it in its transition period, before it becomes the dullest and most competent country in the world instead of the most interesting and incoherent; before its tortured and soul-

seared intellectuals have become hard-faced and taciturn factory-managers. Before Omsk and Tomsk have become indistinguishable from Leeds and Sheffield. And I suppose, if one can, one should see the Kremlin and the Tomb of Lenin before one dies, and loiter with a more or less vacant eye in the Red Square and the Park of Leisure and Culture. What a Wellstopian, prophetic ring that has! And Leningrad is, perhaps, the only great modern Dead City. And I was to visit Kiev and Komsk while they are still strange places and not merely dots on the map of a five-year-plan. But chiefly I want to go because the Russian character fascinates me."

"But is there such a conception as a 'national character'?" protested Bob. "Go into the nearest pub and every one in it will have a different 'character.'"

"The foreigner would almost certainly discern a strong family likeness amongst most of them, and he would be right. How charming it would be to experiment in inter-racial breeding. To produce a being a quarter French, a quarter Bavarian, a quarter Swedish-American and a quarter English, all from selected stocks. Such a being might prove a super-man."

"More probably a super-Gallin," replied Bob. "Anyhow I've seen your Tombs of Lenin and your Red Squares on the movies, and that's good enough for me." He was silent for a time, then he said: "There's one rather important thing to decide; what about that fellow's future?"

"I've thought of that," Faraday replied. "Punishment is, perhaps, an absurd word to apply to a person such as Gallin. He is a psychopathic case, and you can no more punish such than you can punish a cat. But it is our duty to see that he is rendered harmless, for he might strike again—in fact almost certainly would if he had the opportunity and thought it worth his while. If he cannot be rendered so legally, then we must apply other methods."

"You mean you will take it upon yourself?"

"If necessary his case will be decided out of court. But wait till you have seen him on the other matter."

"Right," said Bob. "I'll see him in the morning. Now I think I'll go and say 'Good-night' to Lucy."

"There's no need for me to come with you. She has made splendid progress in the last twenty-four hours, an admirable example of the fact that—especially in the case of women—physical health and emotional health are interacting inseparables. From now on you can do her far more good than I can."

"Her nerves are still jumpy."

"Inevitably so; that is the final symptom of her trouble—the clearing shower, as it were. In a week all but a certain numbness should have disappeared."

"I'll ring you as soon as I've seen Gallin," said Bob.

He did so at half-past eleven the next morning.

"I'm with Gallin," he said. "Could he come round to see you at half-past nine to-night?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. I'm coming along to see you now."

"He's really a baddish actor," said Bob when he arrived.

"He's greatly in need of money—I'm certain of it. The sun of cupidity kept bursting through the clouds of ill-concealed indifference; he couldn't control his face. And I'm certain he wants that money now—why, heaven knows, for the place looks like prosperity itself. Of course the idea came as a complete surprise to him; the project might possibly interest him. In any case, it would do no harm to have a talk with you—something might come of it. He wasn't very confident—that sort of obvious, transparent tripe."

"I expected it," said Faraday. "He's up against it in some way. I've made some inquiries in the trade, and Glovfit's are considered the best things of their kind on the market. There's some mystery which we will solve."

"It was a damned odd sensation," said Bob, "talking amicably to a person who's tried to kill my future wife. The idea seemed entirely fantastic and unreal. Are you perfectly certain you're right? Those infernal wenches could have employed that method on Lucy; and as for

Arthur—well, who knows what happened to that dope after that girl got it? After all, she and that fellow are a couple of crooks, when all's said and done. They may have thought Arthur had left them some money. I imagine a wallet-dropper wouldn't be too scrupulous."

"That is perfectly true, as I've had pointed out to me only too forcibly. The girls at Glovfit's certainly had motive—a motive strong enough for them to have made two previous attempts on her life. They had obvious opportunity. Peggy Camden had equally perfect opportunity and a motive for drugging him, his death being accidental and due to an overdose. The evidence against Gallin, as it stands at present, is so weak that he would never be brought to trial. That was impressed on me, also."

"Then what?" asked Bob astonished.

"I am absolutely convinced of his guilt. After long thought I have decided what is my duty in the matter. Now listen to me."—He continued talking earnestly to Bob for some minutes.

"I don't like it," said the latter, when Faraday had finished. "Surely there's some risk in it for you; I cannot allow you to take it."

"No risk at all, and my mind is made up. There is no need for you to be there."

"Don't be a fool!"

"Well, then, be here punctually at nine. And now I have some work to do!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

FARADAY spent the afternoon in his laboratory. When he sat down to dinner at seven, he looked tired and depressed. After a bottle of champagne he felt better prepared for the ordeal. During dinner he gave Bounser some instructions, which the latter received with his habitual placidity.

"I'll fix 'im, sir," he remarked with great confidence. "Did you ever go to that there all-in wrestlin'?"

"No, I've never been."

"Well, you learns some funny strokes there, sir. I goes to a place in Kilburn. Very 'ot, they are there, sir. There's a bloke what calls 'isself the Spanish Strangler. And 'e was takin' on a bloke what calls 'isself the Glasgow Gouger, sir. And this Strangler, 'e pushes the Gouger to the h'edge of the ring, and 'e twists the rope around 'is neck."

"Well, you can't do that to-night," said Faraday, laughing.

"No, sir, that's right. But as I was a-sayin', the ref., 'e tries to stop it, so the Strangler 'e goes for the ref. While 'e's doin' that, the Gouger 'e gets be'ind the Strangler and 'e puts 'is knee in 'is back-side, sir, and 'is h'arm round 'is neck, and bends 'im backways. Then the ref. 'its 'im under the chin. It was worth a tanner, sir, to 'ear 'im 'oller. I might try that stroke, sir, if ne'ssry."

"I should imagine it would be quite effective," said Faraday, "but I hope it won't come to that. Now I'll show you exactly how to place the talantulus and glasses."

Bob arrived as nine was striking.

Faraday repeated to him the instructions he had given Bounser.

"I don't anticipate there'll be any trouble," he said, "but Gallin's temper is an unknown quantity."

"I could exterminate him with one arm," replied Bob, "and nothing would give me greater pleasure."

They had a drink and set themselves to wait. Bob shifted about in his chair and played havoc with a Hojo de Monterrey. Faraday appeared to be completely at his ease, which was by no means the case, for he detested the whole sordid business. Their talk was scrappy and disjointed. When the clock struck the half-hour both were more than ready for things to begin. They had not long to wait. Within five minutes they heard the bell ring, and a moment later Bounser announced, "Mr. Gallin to see you, sir."

Faraday got up to greet him.

"Very good of you to come, Gallin. Take this more or less comfortable chair."

"Good-evening, Bob," said Gallin, settling himself down and accepting a cigar. "Don't thank me for coming," he continued. "Bob was necessarily vague, and I was only too glad to have this opportunity of hearing from your own lips what you propose." He was quite at his ease, but seemed slightly tense and eager.

"I must be rather vague, too," replied Faraday. "It was simply that I feel I have wandered long enough, and should like to settle down in England with a small stake in the country, as it were, and your business attracted me. I have no intention of going back into practice."

"Yes, yes, I quite understand and, I may say, there is no one I would rather have as a partner than yourself. I may add that I am in no financial need of one."

"But the possibility might interest you?"

"Yes, I think I can say that. But what is it in my business which attracts you?"

"For one thing, it seems exceptionally well run, if I may say so. Again, as a medical man, it interests me, for it has its medical—or rather, surgical—side. Your products are, of course, luxury garments, but they are also scientific appliances.—But let us have a drink."

He went to the sideboard, and presently all three had glasses beside them. Gallin raised his to Faraday, and to Bob, and swallowed half its contents.

"You are perfectly right," he said. "Let me tell you how I came to go into this curious business."

"Please do," said Faraday.

"I was trained as a chemist, but I always had a pretty good business head, I think. For some reason or other—I cannot explain it—I found myself becoming interested in women's foundation garments—one of those discreetly horrible terms which are spawned in the garment business. I believe I invented it, by the way. I can assure you," he continued with a smile, "that it was no case of fetishism—I have never had the remotest interest in women from the sensual point of view. Ninety per cent of them are grossly malformed in some respect or other and, to an ascetic like

myself, they are one and all jerely merry-built bipeds who'd look much more tolerable feathered. For this reason nudism will never be more than a crank cult, in my opinion. This antipathy has been very valuable to me in business, for it has enabled me to remain coldly critical; many a man in my line of business has been seduced from his judgment by the charms of his staff." He smiled again and drained his glass.

Faraday was watching him closely. Here was a fanatic, a man of one idea if ever there was one. His smile was odd, too. It reminded Faraday of one of those wooden masks of his childhood which, by tugging a string, were made to change their clown expressions. Gallin's smile came and went in just such a contorted, lightning way. But his eyes did not join in the transformation.

"Well, there it was," he went on. "I used to spend hours prowling about the primitive corset-departments of those days. It sounds ludicrous, but I used to do it. What I saw at once disgusted and excited me. Torturing tight-lacers, hideous masses of boned embroidery, lace-topped, whose only function was to collect filth and sweat—and so on. Not one was capable of doing its proper job, which is, of course, to support but not compress; to yield, but always to control. They were hardly an advance on the iron charcoal-burners, and leather and brocade monstrosities of centuries ago. I made a prolonged study of corsets through the ages, and I studied anatomy with equal assiduity. I also worked long hours in my laboratory, for I realised there was a fortune to be made by the right person, and I was certain I was such a one. I had just sufficient private means to enable me to go ahead. Suffice it to say that, after prolonged experiment, I invented the material from which my products are made, and I applied scientific principles to their design—for the first time in history. In every respect, support, control, simplicity, ventilation and cleanliness; they were revolutionary, and they have done more to mitigate the greatest mistake ever made by a mammal—

the adoption of the erect position—than any other appliances ever put on the market.

“ Since I started my business, twenty years ago, I have thought of nothing else—that is literally true. I have no other interest in life. My business has been, and still is, my wife, my child, my only occupation, my sole relaxation, the love of my life, my overmastering preoccupation ; with the result that I have completely transformed the corset industry, and been a minor benefactor of womankind—mankind, too, for I have made women far healthier, better-tempered and, to those who can experience the sensation, far more alluring.” That queer smile came and went.

“ Get us another drink, Bob,” said Faraday. “ Well, Gallin, that’s very interesting. It would be, naturally, the scientific aspect of your goods which would appeal to me.”

“ Quite ; it is the same with me. But I have to make them pretty to sell them. Tell a woman that something’s good for her and she sheers off. Tell her that it improves her appearance, even if it is injurious to her, and she’ll spend her last penny on it. In my business you have to get your results by stealth. Incidentally, mine is entirely a luxury trade. I sell no corset under three guineas, and no suspender-belt or brassière under thirty shillings.”

“ And I take it,” said Faraday, “ that you have defeated all your competitors. I mean that you have an unassailable position in that luxury trade ? ”

Gallin took a long pull at the glass Bob had handed him.

“ I doubt,” he replied, “ if one can ever quite say that. Of course I have powerful competitors, but I am not afraid of them.”

“ I suppose the cost of advertising is a serious matter ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Gallin abruptly. “ And what an infernal waste of money ! I have to spend large sums, not in telling the public that I have something good to sell them, but practically to persuade them not to buy something else. I’m not advertising *for* them so much as *against* my competitors. And the public pay in the end, and the Press

Lords pocket the swag. I imagine you know about patent medicines, Faraday ? ”

“ Yes,” replied the latter impatiently—it was time for business. “ Now, Gallin, I have examined one of Lucy’s belts, or corsets, and it seemed satisfactory from the hygienic point of view. But you will understand that, as a medical man, I have to be absolutely certain that they’re innocuous to the wearer. I mean when worn next to the skin.”

“ You can be quite reassured,” said Gallin. “ They’re perfectly harmless ; they wouldn’t be much good if they weren’t.”

“ And in no case could they be harmful to the wearer ? ”

Gallin gave him a sharp glance.

“ In the case of very acid subjects they have occasionally produced mild dermatitis, but that only meant they were doing their job by disclosing the existence of the poison, and helping to eliminate it.”

“ Excuse my asking,” said Faraday. “ I was just a little doubtful. Now, I take it, when they’re worn next to the skin, it is necessary to powder the body very freely to ease them on—especially in hot weather ? ”

Gallin’s hand with the glass in it came down slowly to his knee.

“ That is the case with the flick-on models,” he replied. “ But aren’t we going rather too much into detail at this stage ? ”

“ And I suppose,” remarked Faraday, slowly and pointedly, “ it is necessary to be very careful what sort of powder one uses ? For example, I have here——” he put his hand in his pocket and brought out a small object——“ a tin of powder which I found in Lucy’s dressing-room at your office.”

Gallin became motionless. He stared hard at Faraday. “ What about it ? ” he asked harshly.

“ I was rather surprised to find the powder in this tin heavily impregnated with arsenious acid. Or, perhaps, I wasn’t so surprised.”

Gallin shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what the devil you're talking about. If there's arsenic in that tin, I can only imagine that you put it there."

"Let's talk about something else," said Faraday quietly. "Let's discuss for a moment that medicine which Doctor Reynolds prescribed for Arthur Bault."

Gallin continued to stare at Faraday.

"Now I asked Reynolds to show me the prescription for that medicine. I examined it; and then pointed out that there was no mention of dial in that prescription. The doctor was extremely indignant at the suggestion that he'd used such a drug. In fact he said that to have done so would have been equivalent to murdering the young man."

"Why did you suggest it?"

Faraday again put his hand in his pocket. "I have here," he said, "some of the medicine which was administered to Bault. It consists of a strong solution of dial."

Gallin eyed it curiously. "Very interesting," he said. "How did you get hold of it?"

Faraday told him. Gallin nodded. "I see. Rash young woman!"

"I don't think so. I understand that you personally handed her small bottles of this medicine. I must say it was bad luck that by such an odd chance it was not all consumed."

He went to a drawer in his bureau and brought out still another object.

"I have here the corset Lucy wore when she was last taken ill. It had been lavishly sprinkled with powder—undoubtedly from this tin."

"How did you discover that?" asked Gallin, who seemed to have recovered his equanimity.

"I happened to knock it off a chair in Lucy's bedroom. When I picked it up I detected a strong smell of garlic. You, as a trained chemist, will understand the inevitable inference."

"No," said Gallin. "What the devil has a smell of garlic to do with it?"

"Well," exclaimed Faraday, "I should think you're the only so-called trained chemist in the world who doesn't know that, when warmed, arsenious acid gives off a garlic smell. But perhaps you've got a bit rusty?"

Gallin was silent for a few moments. Presently he said, "I probably knew it once. But this discussion is becoming tiresome. I may say that I'm quite a good judge of the value of evidence."

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied Faraday. "You will then be able to estimate the effect on the minds of a jury of this little story: There was once a young man, and his sister, who had a great deal of money. And they also shared a wicked uncle who wanted that money. The young man was easily disposed of. His sister got his money. Then the wicked uncle thought of a very ingenious scheme. He knew it was possible for a person to absorb a lethal dose of arsenic through the skin, and he realised that absorption would be more complete when the body was sweating. So he mixed arsenic with her toilet powder, and put it in her dressing-room during heat-waves, with the result that she very nearly died."

"If I were a member of that jury," said Gallin, "I should protest to the judge at being told such fairy tales."

"And if you were the wicked uncle?"

"I shouldn't worry in the least."

"Supposing he confessed?"

"I can't exactly see him doing it."

"Supposing he knew that he'd be dead in twenty-four hours if he didn't?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" exclaimed Gallin.

"Now, then, Gallin, will you confess?" Faraday's tone had changed completely; it was now stern and uncompromising.

"Don't be a fool! Tell your cock-and-bull stories to someone else."

Faraday shrugged his shoulders. "Then you'll be a dead man by this time to-morrow."

Gallin leaned forward in his chair. "I ask you again: what the hell are you talking about?"

"I'll tell you. One of my greatest hobbies is toxicology. During my wanderings I've collected many strange poisons. You have during the last three-quarters of an hour had administered to you a fatal dose of one. It was in your first whisky-and-soda."

Gallin burst out laughing.

"If I were you, I shouldn't laugh, Gallin," said Bob sharply. "I've known Faraday for a good number of years, but I've never known him bluff."

"My dear Bob," said Gallin. "I'd almost forgotten you were present. Do you really expect me to believe in the Unknown Poison tripe! I suppose it can't be detected after death—another of the doctor's fairy tales!"

"See how you're feeling this time to-morrow," replied Bob.

"Dead men cannot describe their sensations," said Faraday. "If I took you into my little laboratory, Gallin, I could show you twenty-six other such 'unknown poisons,' as you term them. The statement that there are no such things is as ignorant as it is dogmatic. There are many. All of them are probably rare and hard to come by, and their medicinal and, therefore, commercial value is uncertain, if it exists. How long has the drug Marihuana been known to the West? Yet it is a prolific and fairly widely-distributed weed. What you have just consumed is used by the witch-doctors of a tribe in New Guinea. It is distilled from the roots of a small purple flower, which I have found nowhere else."

Gallin leaned forward again and looked Faraday full in the face. "I don't believe you *are* bluffing," he said.

"As Bob told you, I never do. I'm no good at it, and in any case it's usually a waste of time. But to continue I have still another thing in my pocket. Here it is. In this little phial is the complete antidote to that poison—also employed by the witch-doctors. If you will sign a confession I have here, I will put it in your next whisky-

and-soda." He took a typed paper from a drawer in the desk. "Would you like to read it?"

"No thanks," Gallin replied dryly. "I can imagine its contents."

"Quite. It sets forth exactly how you murdered Bault and attempted to murder Lucy."

Gallin leaned back in his chair and put his head down between his hands. He remained quite still for some moments, staring at the floor. Presently he put his head up.

"How soon do I have to take that antidote?" he asked.

"Within the next four hours."

Gallin stared down at the floor again. Then he said:

"Give me another drink."

His expression had changed; the fight had gone out of it. He appeared detached, almost serene.

"I suppose," he said, "you wonder why I, a rich man, went in for this kind of thing?"

"Yes," replied Faraday. "I have wondered."

"I'm not a natural murderer, or any kind of criminal—I suppose there are such people. But as I've suggested to you, on one point I'm probably insane—my business. By my intelligence, guts and grinding hard work, it was born and it has prospered. Also I employ three hundred people, which gives me a sense of power, though that is a minor point. Without my business I should merely be the bereft shadow of a man. But for some time I have been faced with the fact that I might be reduced to that. A syndicate with a huge sum of money behind it are out to beat me and a number of other comparatively small firms. They want, with their golden, squid tentacles, to choke us and absorb our essence. They are far viler murderers than I am. They offered to buy me out for an insulting sum which I refused. They are marketing products similar, though inferior to mine, at cut prices. My sales are steadily dropping. I don't mind being undersold so much, but I cannot compete with their advertising. If I could, I *might* beat them. If I'd had the Bault money I *might* have done it. My business must always come first, so I did what I

did. I suppose I've no morals and no vices ; I'm simply a robot plus a brain and an over-mastering obsession. I was fond of Arthur and I'm fond of Lucy, but my business is my passion, and nothing else counts with me. Do you understand ? "

" Yes," replied Faraday.

" Every one who is held by a violent passion must know the sensation. Look here, Faraday, I shall never attempt anything of the kind again. If I die, my business dies with me, and three hundred people will be thrown on the streets. Will you put up enough money for me to fight that syndicate ? "

" No ! " exclaimed Faraday, taken aback by this fantastic proposal.

" I didn't expect it. Tell me, is this poison painful ? "

" No, otherwise I should not have given it to you. Its action resembles that of hemlock. Now let me advise you to sign this paper. You will have a fighting chance for your life in court ? "

" Possibly. Would you deny in your evidence that you had extorted this confession ? "

" Yes. I should commit perjury without a qualm, for I should consider myself completely justified in so doing."

" Certainly. I'd do most things to see you hanged."

Gallin smiled. " Put me in a book ; that would be punishment enough. I've only read one of them, but that convinced me it was very fortunate you had private means. Well, I don't think much of that fighting chance. I like the calm, dispassionate way in which we're discussing my fate and prospects. However, I have made up my mind. In any case my business would be taken from me, and prison would finish me in a very few months, though probably I should die in Broadmoor. So you can put that antidote back in your pocket. It won't be your euthanasiac dope which kills me, in any case. One last drink, please. Now, Faraday, I was a little nervous of you from the start : a diagnostician was just what I didn't want on the



scene. Yet what have you done in reality, save draw the obvious inferences from two enormous pieces of luck! "

" I know that," said Faraday.

" I wondered what had happened to that tin. I thought Lucy must have taken it home, which suggested possibilities. How is she, by the way? "

" Going on very well," replied Faraday.

" I'm very glad to hear it; I hate waste. I'm glad I don't believe in a future world; I shouldn't look forward to meeting her mother there. Arthur, on the other hand, would probably express his sincere gratitude to me. And now I must go. The whisky's working on me, as you can judge from my futile remarks. I'm not used to the stuff. By the way, what would you have done if I'd refused a drink? "

" I'd made certain preparations to deal with that highly improbable event," said Faraday. " But tell me, what put the idea of using a poisoned corset into your head? "

" My early experiments. I had trouble with sulphur and other things so absorbed. I quite realise it was a clumsy method, but I dared not risk anything more direct. All the same, it very nearly succeeded. Don't glower at me, Bob. It's all over now and I'm not really sorry I failed. As for you, Faraday, I bear you no grudge. You got the breaks, but one must have luck to win and I've had my share. I dare say the syndicate would have downed me in any case. I will send you my secret formulæ and if you like to carry on, you'd better put Cooladge, my works manager, in charge. He knows more than any one else, but that isn't saying much, for there was no real second-in-command in the business. But my advice to you on Lucy's behalf is to sell out to the syndicate. I have made no will and she gets my money. Of course she won't touch it, so you might persuade her to split it up equitably amongst my staff, would you? "

" It shall be done," said Bob.

" And now I must go," said Gallin, " on that long journey which all confessed failures have a right and a

duty to take. Good-bye." He got up abruptly and left the room. A moment later the outside door closed with a clang.

For a time Faraday and Bob sat in silence. At length, the latter said: "Will he really be dead in twenty-four hours?"

"Yes."

"And then an inquest?"

"Unless he has a doctor and some serious organic disease; both of which I doubt."

"And they'll find nothing?"

"Nothing."

"I wonder what he meant by saying that it wouldn't be your dope which would kill him."

Faraday shrugged his shoulders. "It is possible to make more than one guess. The whole business sickens me. It is probably just a gust of irrational sentimentality, but I have a certain sympathy and admiration for him."

"You can't expect me to share it," said Bob harshly.

"No, and most certainly he's a cold-blooded assassin, for whom not a redeeming word can be said. That is unanswerable, in a sense. But I've always had an admiration for any one who by his brains and courage makes something out of nothing, and the doing of it often becomes just such an overmastering obsession as influenced him. Such obsessions can be mercilessly demoralising. Of course love is the great and dominating one, but take an apparently petty urge—the collector's. Many apparently upright and honest men become cunning criminals when some deeply coveted rarity can be illegitimately acquired. Presumably the manifold tortures inflicted by Christian priests were partly due to an obsession with saving souls, though there were other and less flattering contributing factors. I've never regarded drink as such—it is a psychic anodyne. Money-making can be an obsession, and now we find that the manufacture and marketing of corsets can be one. That I should never have guessed, though I had a patient

once who came to me in almost suicidal distress because he could think of nothing else but golf."

"Yes," said Bob, "I understand that more or less, though when such an obsession reveals itself in the capacity to commit wholesale murder it seems to me indistinguishable from insanity. I grant you all these words are vague and telescopic. What do you think his chances would be at the Old Bailey?"

"With a very good counsel, unsadistic judge and an intelligent foreman of the jury, I very much doubt if he'd have been hanged. The evidence could have been made to appear confusing to a jury and the foreman would have realised it. For remember Reynolds would have had to testify that Bault's heart was sufficiently injured for him to give a death certificate without hesitation. I think that would have made the jury reluctant to hang him, though they would have had a perfect right to do so. He'd have got 'life,' I think, which, as he said, would have meant a quick death to one of his temperament. Personally, I shouldn't have cared to be cross-examined on that confession."

"No more should I. But you would have perjured yourself?"

"Certainly, and thought no more about it, for while technically that confession was extorted, Gallin made no attempt to deny his guilt. Furthermore, it was for the good of the community that he should be put away; so long as he remained at liberty he was a danger to others."

"I agree. I will say for him he has guts and a great power of decision; he made up his mind and went. One can see how he made his business. I suppose the possibility of this has been in his mind ever since he made that other decision. He showed little surprise, and I believed him when he said he was glad it was over."

"He must have been living under a terrific strain," said Faraday, "plagued in his business and knowing the huge risk he was running. Well, it has been a loathsome business with a very happy side to it."

"I suppose I must tell Lucy?"

"Yes. She must be absolutely reassured about herself, and that could be brought about in no other way."

"Not much fun for her to realise that her father drank and her uncle murdered."

"Rubbish! More than half the population of the world drink too much, and you can impress on her what is the truth—that Gallin was driven mad by his obsession. She's in love, which makes those under its influence marvellously insensitive to all else. After the inquest, I'm off to Germany. And now to bed, but not to sleep, I fancy."

"I'm not going to thank you," said Bob, getting up.

"You're certainly not. I never felt less like being thanked in my life. Good-night, my dear Bob."

Gallin got a taxi in Oxford Street and drove to his home in a small, dingy road near Wimbledon Common. And his house was small and dingy too. By an effort of will, he threw off the effects of the whisky, and was himself again when he took out his latch-key. As he opened the door, an ancient mongrel dog came waddling up to greet him.

"Hallo, Rex," he said, absent-mindedly patting its head. The dog was the sole occupant of the house, for Gallin's only servant was a maid who came in by the day. From the appearance of his home, one would have judged him to be a penurious person, growing poor, for it was almost unfurnished. His sitting-room, into which he went first, merely contained a desk and two chairs. On the walls were a number of photographs, rather faded, of the exterior and interior of a small factory and the Regent Street offices. On the desk a number of corsets were strewn about. His bedroom, to which he next went, housed an iron bedstead, and a cheap wardrobe and chest of drawers. In the wardrobe were two well-worn suits and a pair of shoes. Gallin was not a person who spent much on himself.

He picked up a box of cigarettes from the mantelpiece and went downstairs again. He sat down at his desk and

began to write, muttering to himself as he did so. A listener would have heard such scraps of monologue as :

" Sulphur, three per cent. Mix seventy-five degrees F. anode, accelerator, garter-reinforce." At length he said, " Well, that's done ! "

Rex, who was lying on the bare floor outside the room, stirred in his sleep and wagged his tail.

Gallin read through what he had written, and suddenly his expression changed. A look, almost of anguish, came over his face, and he tore the sheets into small pieces.

" It shall die with me ! " he exclaimed.

He lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, gazing in upon himself. His mind went back through the long, lonely years of toil. He picked up a corset from the pile on the desk and scrutinised it minutely for a time. He put it down, and then with one swift, continuous movement, took something from a drawer, placed it to his head and pulled the trigger.

Rex woke up abruptly and cocked his ears. Then he lumbered to his feet and began whining and scratching at the door.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FARADAY'S trip to Germany profoundly depressed his spirit. Europe was back in the Dark Ages, all the darker for the glow of blast furnaces churning out huge maimers of men, and he realised that all that millions had died and suffered for was to make the world an intolerable place for sensitive people to live in. He thought of the thousands of little village war memorials, those cheaply chiselled catalogues of chiselled men. And everywhere the strong and the brutal were flogging on their purblind serfs to pour out the gas, the shells, the phosphorus bombs, by which they themselves would be sent screaming to their deaths, instructed by the scientists, blessed by the priests—the ultimate irony. For Science should coldly, Religion

passionately, have repudiated that vileness, the one made possible, the other sanctified.

Lucy and Bob were made one in a Registrar's office. The fact that the official was in an advanced stage of adenoids in no way subtracted from the solemnity of the occasion. After which they set sail in the *Empress of Britain* to tour the rounded globe. Lucy was as well as she had ever been before, and probably happier than she would ever be again; while Bob had not only secured the lady of his heart, but had conceived and was about to give birth to the finest plot for a novel which had ever been fertilised in the brain of man. His other one had gone to the printers, but for the moment, at least, he referred to it as a jejune work which he'd probably suppress when he'd been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Faraday saw them off at Southampton, and the two large tears which trickled down Lucy's cheeks when she said *Au revoir* and a certain look on Bob's face at the same moment, were all the recompense Faraday needed for having been forced to undergo an extremely distasteful experience.

Soon after he was back in his flat the telephone bell rang. It was Mrs. Chalneys asking if she could come round to see him. He replied he'd be delighted, and he really meant it.

Though to him she was merely a minor character in a finished episode, he genuinely liked the little lady he had so unjustly suspected.

She was looking keyed-up and resolute, he thought, but what an exquisite miniature she was, possessing something that his dear Lucy would always lack.

"Well," she said, "you're wondering why I've come, aren't you?"

"In a way—but I'm very glad to see you."

She sat down, took off her hat and lit a cigarette.

"I've come to confess," she said. "First of all, I wasn't really ill, but I couldn't go to that wedding. But that isn't what I want to confess—though you're the only person I'd do it to, because you're proof against women."

"I have never considered that anything admirable," Faraday replied with a smile.

"All the same, there should always be people like you to comfort and be kind to people like me. I mean scientific people who can understand and talk to women without wanting to sleep with them, or even without bothering about their bodies at all. And I can tell you there are very few such people. I'm saying all this badly, but I'm sure you understand."

Faraday was at once touched and amused. "It probably only means their secretions are inadequate," he replied.

"That may be, but it's no use always bothering about the causes of things. If yours are inadequate, it's because you wish them to be. Don't be facetious about your age—you look not a day over forty-five. Now you suspected me of poisoning Lucy, didn't you?"

An awkward question. "Suspect," he said, "is far too strong a word. I was just——"

"And you were perfectly right, she interrupted." "At one time I very nearly did."

Faraday said nothing. It was a moment for silence.

"I'm going to tell you about myself," she went on. "My mother loved a man who jilted her, and she married my father to revenge herself on men. She actually hated him. I've seen her flash her skirts away when he came near her. I was to her a sort of permanent symbol of a horrible experience. She was very strong and ruthless—my father was weak and gentle. She was also religious in a way.

"She used to beat me brutally, and then pray almost madly, the tears streaming through her fingers. If my father tried to protect me, she'd strike him in the face with all her might. As a kid I couldn't understand it—other people's mothers and fathers weren't like that. Why were mine? I became neurotic and hated every one. Then, when I was nineteen, old Chalneys got a sort of senile lust for me and I married him to get away from home. I'd have married any one to do that. But it wasn't

much of a getaway. My husband began by being a horrible, ancient amorist and ended up a cantankerous, utterly selfish hypochondriac. I had always to be at his beck and call. He was always threatening me. 'No money for you, my girl, if you go gadding about when I want you!' One evening when he was in a vile temper I took up a bottle of his medicine, and poured out a dose. Just as I was putting the glass down by his bedside I saw it was the wrong bottle. I had a moment's agonising fight inside me, and then I put the glass down. It killed him, and I was free.

"Then I met Bob, and felt I'd be happy at last. But Lucy came and took him from me. It was too much. For a time I loathed her, and didn't care what I did. I meant to kill her if I could. I used to lie awake planning the best way. Then, one day—I can't explain it—I suddenly realised I was fond of her, and that—loving Bob as I did—I had to sacrifice myself. Perhaps it was simply that I'd realised Bob would never marry me and that I must make the best of it. Anyway, from that moment I felt almost happy and almost at peace. So there you are; that's how I murdered one person and almost murdered another. And though I've said I'm almost happy, I'm also a terribly lonely person, with nothing to look forward to. What a muddle!" She burst into tears.

Faraday got up, poured out a brandy and soda, and gave it her. She drank it eagerly and dried her eyes.

"Mrs. Chalneys," said Faraday, "for what my opinion's worth, I think you're a good and brave woman. Considering you might have been hanged and had another murder in your heart, that is, of course, a very scandalous statement. But if human beings are tried too high they must revolt—in a sense they have a right to. Injustice can be too great to be borne—His Majesty's judges notwithstanding. Your upbringing was enough to have ruined any one, and you have conquered it. Look here, I am leaving for a longish tour in Russia on Thursday, will you come with me?"

Mrs. Chalneys set down her glass with a bang and stared at him.

"Go to Russia with you!" she exclaimed.

"It's just an idea. It might serve to divert and ease your mind. I should merely be your courier, as it were—I speak the language. We should be completely independent, but when you wanted my services they would be at your disposal."

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Chalneys. "You don't like women and you *do* like travelling alone. Surely I should be *the* perfect nuisance to you."

Faraday smiled. "I am rather a hermit," he said, "but I'm no misanthrope; and I imagine I enjoy the company of women far more than they enjoy mine. As for travelling alone—well, I shouldn't take a woman to very uncivilised places, she wouldn't enjoy it, and nor should I. But Russia—*pace* the Tory press—isn't quite uncivilised. We should be—at least I hope so—just good companions."

"Very charmingly put, but you're only suggesting this to help me."

Faraday knew this was partly true.

"Very well," he replied, "let us suppose I'm an ethical snob and like helping people—a form of self-indulgence. To be serious, I should very much like you to come. Will you?"

"Yes," she replied. "I know I'm being selfish, but I can't resist the temptation. Oh, how I like kind, cold men!"

"That's settled then. It will be rather expensive."

"I've far more money than I can spend."

"And you can be ready to start in three days' time? We'll see about your—passport and so on to-morrow."

"I know you'll regret this."

Faraday laughed. "Aren't you being slightly over-modest? I can imagine few men—even if they're suffering from incipient senile decay, who would be overcome with regret at the idea of having you for a travelling com-

panion. . . . Now then; hurry along and start your packing : you will have a long day to-morrow."

When she had gone, Faraday leaned back in his chair. Well, he thought, sometimes things done on impulse completely justified themselves. Perhaps he'd let himself in for something. But what a family history ! What a strange and troubled life. Poor little creature !

He rang the bell and Bounser entered.

" Bounser, help me turn out some drawers."

" Very good, sir," replied that person gloomily—he hated the thought of Thursday.

In the top drawer of a wardrobe Faraday found Lucy's belt. Bounser looked discreetly astonished.

Faraday held it to his face and then handed it to Bounser.

" Smell that," he said.

Bounser did so and wrinkled his nose.

" Ever smelt anything like that before ? "

" Yes, sir, that's garlic, that is, and I've no use for the muck. D'you know, sir, what they calls it where I come from ? "

" No. What ? "

" ' Poor Man's Treacle,' sir."